

THE PROMOTERS



WILLIAM HAWLEY SMITH



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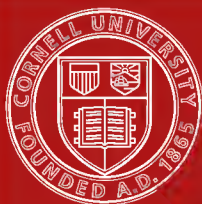
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The promoters, a novel without a woman.



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The Promoters



*"He labored with the bill, working till his brain reeled."
Page 308.*

The Promoters

A Novel Without a Woman

By

William Hawley Smith

Author of "The Evolution of Dodd"

Illustrated by

John Clitheroe Gilbert



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By WILLIAM HAWLEY SMITH

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CHAPTER I.

GOLDSBY and Starleigh had met by appointment at a famous hostelry where their kind, of this day and age, are wont to congregate. It was Starleigh who had taken the initiative in their coming together, but Goldsby was as willing to be where he was as Starleigh had been anxious to have him there. It was not the first time that they had joined forces for mutual benefit, and it had come to be next to the inevitable that whatever one of them took a hand in, the other was also a party to. They had duly registered, secured their favorite rooms in the hotel, seen their baggage properly bestowed, ordered the drinks, lighted cigars, and were comfortably seated in the somewhat ultra-luxurious parlor which was common to their sleeping rooms adjoining.

Starleigh closed the door that led into the hall and turned the key in the lock.

"Have you always considered me a sane party, Goldsby, old man?" he said, as he flung himself

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into a ponderous armchair, threw a stout leg over the arm and puffed vigorously at his cigar.

"Well, yes! On the whole, yes!" replied Goldsby. He paused a second, and then added: "To be honest with you, I've sometimes thought you were a trifle visionary, but I never considered you seriously off."

And they both laughed heartily, for they knew each other through and through.

"I put it that way to begin with," continued Starleigh, "because I don't want to have any interruption after I get started. I don't want to have you come plumping in with a 'But you're crazy, man!' just when I get to where things begin to culminate. So if you're sure of my sanity, we'll go ahead with the deal."

He knocked an inch of white ash from his cigar with a flick of his little finger. The deposit fell in a flaky shower on the immaculate blue velvet carpet.

"I'll agree not to call you down unless you froth at the mouth," said Goldsby, as he settled himself into an expectant attitude, and added, "Let 'er go!"

"That's just what I will," replied Starleigh, "for I'm so full of it that I shall burst if I don't unload. I can't tell you, old man, what I've suffered in the last two weeks, waiting for you to get

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in from across the water. I wired you as soon as I felt sure I had the thing solid, and it seems like an age since I got your cable that you'd come on the first steamer. You're the only man in all the world that I dare open up the scheme to, and I have nearly died with fear that somebody else might get onto it before we could get it where we could hold it down.

"You see these things are in the air. I tell you I'm getting to think that when once an idea gets to going in the world it is liable to be picked up by any one of a thousand or ten thousand heads. For the last three months I've really been afraid to go where people were for fear they'd take it from me by induction, as they steal messages off the wires. I'm so full of it that it seems to me it sticks out all over me; and if it isn't more than any one man ever held before, then I'm a goat."

He flicked another round of ash, and went on:

"Brace up in your chair there, now, so that you won't go through the wall when I open up, and let me tell you what I'm going to do! Goldsby, old man, *I'm going to move the world!* I'm going to pull the north pole out of its present socket, and stick it through the earth in a new place! That isn't just the *way* I'm going to do it, but it is practically what I'm going to do! I'm

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going to change the location of every zone on all this globe! I'm going to change the climate and rainfall on every foot of ground on the whole earth's surface! I'm going to readjust the ocean currents and tides, turn the trade winds in new directions, make high-lands into swamps and deserts into gardens of the Lord!

"How's that for a starter, old man? Oh, don't go back on me now," he exclaimed, as Goldsby showed signs of alarm, and began to look about a trifle anxiously. "You swore, a minute ago, that I was mentally sound, and what I was then I am now, as sure as we are both here. Feel of my pulse!" And he stretched out his left hand toward his friend.

Goldsby waved him off, emptied the glass that stood at his elbow, blinked a trifle, and only remarked:

"Go on! I'm between you and the door, and the key is sticking out where I can reach it."

He squared himself in his chair again, and then added:

"But let's get down to business! If you've really got something to divulge, let's have it, and leave romancing till later."

"But I tell you, old man, I mean what I say! I was afraid you wouldn't catch on to start with, and so I primed you with regard to my sanity. But

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I tell you I'm all right. I'll admit that the scheme seems absolutely impossible at first blush, but it is perfectly feasible when you come to understand how I'm going to do it. I've got the whole thing ciphered out to the minutest detail, and I can do it just as surely as you can take that bottle off from the table and set it on a chair. I can do everything I've stated so far, and a thousand things besides that the doing of all this will bring about. I tell you, what I've got is something more than the howl of a ragged lunatic to a house full of gaping suckers who have paid a dollar and a half apiece to hear the hero of Monte Cristo yell, 'The world is mine!' For the world is mine,—or ours, for I've got to have you to help me in the deal. The world is ours, and we'll play with it as a juggler plays with a ball. We'll turn it where we please, when we please, and as we please! We'll settle the destiny of the people of the whole earth, and get a rake-off on everything they have to do with, or live on, or hope for!

"There!" he exclaimed, as though he had now come to a place where he could anchor for an instant. "That's an outline of the scheme, and just as soon as it gets settled down a little and steadied in your brain, as it were, I'll tell you all about how I got the idea, and how I've worked

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it out. But don't you ever doubt for a minute that it is all solid and sound, and that it will all pan out just as I have told you, to the last weight of a hair or turn of a screw."

Both the men got up and paced the floor for several minutes. Neither of them spoke a word, but each stole furtive glances at the other as they walked. Finally Starleigh broke out, as he strode back and forth:

"Let me begin at the beginning," he said, in a much quieter tone of voice than he had so far used, "and then you'll understand the whole scheme from start to finish.

"When I was a boy in school I read that speech of old Archimedes to the effect that he could move the world if he could only find a fulcrum. I've found a fulcrum! Or I've found what amounts to the same thing. Yes, it's a fulcrum. And what's more, what I've found is a fulcrum located where you can get at it!

"The old man's idea was," he went on, "that in order to move the world you'd have to get a leverage from some place *outside* the earth, and of course you couldn't do that. That's where he was dead wrong. His main idea was first class, but his means of working it out weren't worth a rush. That's a common fault with impractical men. You and I have seen it demonstrated a

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hundred times by fellows who could see a good thing, but hadn't sense enough, or nerve enough, to get it.

"But I have discovered that you can get your leverage all right if you only know where to look for it. I found out where to look for it, and I found it there waiting for me to pick it up, just as every invention has loafed around for ages, in plain sight, waiting for some one that had eyes sharp enough to see it. I had eyes sharp enough to see the fulcrum that I can move the world with, and all I've got to do now is to use it, to pry on it, and I can turn this old globe wherever I please and whenever I please.

"It's curious, too, how I happened to stumble onto it. I was invited by a friend of mine who has a fine yacht to go on a little cruise with him, down about fifty miles southeast of Sandy Hook, to see one of the new war-ships go through the process of testing her guns on shipboard. We had a fine sail down, and it was a sight worth looking at to see the big ship put through her paces. We watched her at a respectful distance for about half an hour, and finally, when we were right astern, she fired a thirteen-inch gun square from her broadside. As it happened, I was looking straight at the vessel when the gun was fired and I noticed that she careened away over to one

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side from the recoil, so much so that I said to a fellow who was standing by me: 'If they fired enough of those guns at once, and all on one side, they'd roll the old boat bottom side up, wouldn't they?' And he came back at me: 'They'd roll the *world* bottom side up if there was enough guns all on one side, and they fired 'em all together!'

"Well, of course, with all that was going on that day, I didn't think so very much about it just then; but after I got home that night it came to me what the fellow said, and I got to studying on it, and I've been a-studying on it ever since; and if I haven't found out a thing or two, then I don't know black from white.

"You see the principle's right here. You've got to have a fulcrum to roll a war-ship over, and ordinarily you'd have to locate that fulcrum outside the boat; but I saw that old hull swing away over without any outside fulcrum at all. The fact is, she had her fulcrum with her all the time; it was her *center of gravity*, away down below the water line somewhere. The kick of the gun pried across this, and as a result the hull was rocked to one side, and there you are. The thing is as simple as A B C, and my only wonder is that I never thought of it till the remark of that fellow put me onto it.

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"But what he said is true. If we can get guns enough, all in one place on the earth's surface, and fire 'em often enough and long enough, we can turn the world any way we please. *The center of the earth is the fulcrum* and we'll pry over it, and don't you ever think we won't."

"Oh, stuff!" said Goldsby. "Why, just think of the comparative size of a war-ship and of the world. You couldn't do it in a thousand years."

"I can do it inside of ten years, and I will do it too," replied Starleigh somewhat warmly. "And I'll tell you how, if you'll keep your shirt on. Do you know the force of a blow? It's immense. You can drive a fortypenny nail into an oak plank with a tack hammer if only you take your time and strike hard enough and often enough. It ain't the comparative size of anything, when it comes to blows, but it's the force and the persistence that do the business. Now the kicks of the guns will be like the blows of a hammer, and I can get enough of 'em to make all the force I want, and I know it. The force of a blow is what you didn't count on, isn't it?"

Goldsby said that he hadn't counted on that, and intimated that he was now willing that Starleigh should go on. That gentleman professed his willingness to do so, but before he proceeded he rose and went to the parlor door, opened it,

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and looked out along the hall. He closed and locked it again, then came back and sat down. As he did so, he remarked:

"I wanted to make sure there wasn't any one listening! I tell you, Goldsby, old man, we've got the earth, and we don't want to let it slip away from us through anything as small and insignificant as a keyhole."

Having said which, and emptied a small glass, he resumed:

"So now, all that we've got to do to move the earth is to get guns that are large enough, get enough of 'em and fire 'em often enough and long enough, from a given point on the earth's surface, to hammer the old *mundus* into any track or way we please. That's chapter one, as they say in the story books. We can do it, every time. The thing is solid and sound so far, and it's just as solid and sound to the end as it is up to here. Light a fresh weed, and I'll show you."

Goldsby did as he was bidden, but before Starleigh could go on he interrupted:

"But suppose it is all true, as far as you have gone, what of it? Have you any idea how many guns it would take to kick the world anywhere you please?" He couldn't help smiling as he spoke the words.

"I know just how many guns it will take, and

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what's more, I know just where to locate 'em while they get in their work," replied Starleigh. "You see *that* was the thing that staggered me for awhile, where to put 'em and work 'em, even after I got it figured out how many it would take and how long we'd have to fire 'em. I said to myself, 'Where in all the world can a fellow get a chance to erect ten rows of thirteen-inch guns, fifty feet apart and each row one hundred miles long (for that's what we've got to have), where can we put up such a plant and not have the folks get onto what we are really going to do?' And I tell you, it stumped me for awhile.

"Because, you see, it will never do to let the people of the world know that we are going to revolutionize the whole business, everywhere; if they get this idea before we get things so far that they can't stop 'em, they'll up and kill the whole scheme, beyond question. What we've got to do is to keep dark on what we are really after till the thing is practically done. That's the only way that any great scheme has been carried through successfully in all the world, or anyhow, in modern times. A fellow never dares to show his full hand or he's beaten, sure.

"And so it puzzled me as to where we could find a place to erect our battery, and what excuse we could make for setting it up. And isn't it a

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corker? I lay awake nights with it for more than a month, and never got a glimmer. But finally it came my way again. I kept my eyes open, and I saw something.

“I had to go out into the Black Hills, to look after that mine of ours up at Lead. I went out over the Elkhorn, and I dreaded the ride like a licking. You know what a long dull pull it is through the west of Nebraska, after you get past O'Neill. It was a fine night, though, full moon, and the air as clear as a bell. I wasn't sleepy—thinking of my scheme kept me awake—and I didn't go to bed till almost morning.

“As I was looking out of the car window at the dry wastes we were riding through, the night was so fine that I thought what a paradise that country would be if only the rainfall were sufficient to sustain vegetation. And then I remembered having heard it said that the firing of cannon would produce rainfall! And then my hair stood up, for I knew I'd found what I was looking for once more, and all I needed to do again was to work out the details. Nebraska! The only spot on all the earth that could and would furnish *just* what we wanted, to the last item.

“Why, they'll go in for anything in God's world in Nebraska that promises an increase of rainfall in that state; and, what's more, they'll

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back up any scheme that anybody can propose if there's water in it! Did you ever see two and two come together better to make four?

"Now, what we'll do will be to go before the Nebraska legislature and ask for a charter to erect and fire cannon 'experimentally' in a given locality. Isn't that a good word—'experimentally'?" he laughed. "I lay down and hugged myself when it came to me."

He hugged himself again as he said the word over and over, and laughed and laughed at its fitness. Then he continued:

"What we want is a charter from the state of Nebraska to erect and fire cannon 'experimentally.' That will cover the whole ground, give us all the rope we want and completely hide our tracks as to our real purpose.

"And that's the real secret of getting money out of a franchise, these days, to get a charter that actually covers ever so much more than shows on its face. That is, you want to get a good big blanket word hidden away in it somewhere, one that is comprehensive enough to cover all that anybody may take a notion to put under it. I've seen the thing done a hundred times, with a slick word every time, but I don't think I ever saw a word used that was quite so smooth and filled the

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bill quite so completely as this word 'experimentally' will do for us.

"Then here's another point: In order to make the scheme show small, or, anyhow, not to make it seem too big,—for you've got to look out and not scare folks to death with too big a thing,—we only want to ask permission to experiment in one county. If we do that, I'll bet a horse we can get the legislature to guarantee at least half the expense of the experiment with cannon in one county in Nebraska, and if they'll do that we are made.

"We won't have to name the county till after we get the charter, only to designate that it shall be west of, well, say a north and south line going through Hastings, or Holdredge, or somewhere along in there. They'll bite on anything that promises water west of either of those places.

"Then when we get our franchise we'll pick Cherry County, Nebraska, as the scene of our operations. That county is one hundred miles east and west, by sixty north and south, and it will give us just the room we want exactly, and not a rod to spare. Then we can go to work and put in our plant without a whimper.

"Of course, it won't do to pull the state's leg too hard for their part of the expense, but we can work 'em for a good slice before they know

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what's hurting 'em; and when they finally lie down, we'll just say, 'All right, we'll go ahead alone, but we don't propose to fire a shot till we get enough of a plant to make our experiment a success. We don't believe in any half-way work. But, if you leave us now, you leave all you've put in.' Then we'll show 'em how many guns we propose to put in, and that'll fix 'em. That bluff'll freeze 'em out, and then we can go on and finish our plant, and be ahead every dollar that they've blown in! How's that for a side line, old man?" And again he laughed and took another turn about the room.

"We shall want about one hundred cannon to the mile, for a hundred miles, east and west, and we shall need ten rows of them, or about 100,000 cannon in all. They ought to be at least thirteen-inch guns, though they needn't be so long as the ordinary gun of that make is. All we want is a gun that will kick, and I've always noticed the shorter a gun the harder it kicks!

"We'll set these guns up in ten rows so that they will be a little over fifty feet apart, east and west, and we'll put the rows about six miles apart north and south, and that will just fill Cherry County full,—a perfect fit, all around.

"Of course the guns will all point straight to the north pole, for that is what they are set to kick

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away from! That's the plan of the plant, and it can be set up and made ready for work, and worked, without anybody's getting the least inkling of what we are really after. They'll be thinking rain so hard they'll never dream of anything else!

"Of course the working of the plant is very simple. Each row of ten thousand guns will be loaded at the same time, and they must be fired exactly together. We'll fire 'em by electricity, and with a battery in the center of each row, the guns will all go off practically at the same instant; and we'll get the combined kick of ten thousand thirteen-inch guns at a time, all of 'em kicking tangent to a radius of the earth! Say, won't that be a sight and a sound and an effect worth while? You wait till you see it, and then you'll say so, or we'll quit.

"My notion is that we'll fire the rows of guns at intervals of about a minute apart. That will make ten minutes between the firing of the same row of guns, and I believe we can fire 'em as fast as that and keep 'em cool. Of course the nearer together you can get your shots, or blows, or kicks, the more result you'll get. But we can determine all that by 'experimentation' (Lord, but that is a good word!) when we get to it. The

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main idea is that we fire the guns at exact intervals, and keep up the firing regularly.

"You see the need, or at least the great advantage of regular firing," he added, after a pause. "If the kicks come at regular intervals, in a little while we'll get the advantage of the rhythm that they will set up! Do you know the power of rhythm, or rhythmic motion, as they call it? Why, a two-pound dog trotting across Brooklyn bridge will shake the whole structure till the iron rods on it rattle, provided he is the only thing on the bridge and keeps up his regular trotting. That's the force of rhythm. That's why they always make soldiers break step in marching across a bridge. A regiment of soldiers could break down almost any bridge in the world if they marched across it all stepping together!"

He mused a few minutes, and then went on:

"I expect, of course, that the old world will start a little hard, for it's been stuck a good while right where it is," and he smiled. "But we'll keep up our kicking, and with that and what rhythm will help, we can fetch it, I know. Just pound, pound, pound, 10,000 guns in unison once every minute, till you get your rhythm established, and she'll come a-rushing after awhile, and I know it.

"Well then, when we get it to turning, the

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tendency will be for it to keep on turning. Inertia, you know! Fact is, we can count on inertia for a large per cent of the distance we want to move it. Once a-going always a-going is the idea! If we get the earth started to turning from north to south it will keep on, and turn too far, if we don't head it off. But we can beat that easily enough. All we've got to do, when we think we've got it turned almost enough, is just to point our guns the other way, and let 'em go again, and there you are! Isn't it a scheme?"

He slapped Goldsby on the shoulder, and that worthy responded that it surely was a scheme.

After awhile Goldsby said:

"Have you any idea what 100,000 thirteen-inch guns will cost?"

Starleigh straightened himself up and replied:

"I don't care a rap what they cost. There'll be money enough in it, before we get through, to pay for 'em if they cost a billion. But they won't cost anywhere near as much as that. They won't have to be steel guns. Cast iron will be good enough. So long as they are big and heavy and will kick, that's all that is required! They won't have to be rifled or hardly smooth bored. We can explain to the Nebraskans that we purposely have 'em rough on the inside so that they'll make more noise, and that'll settle it with them; for



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that's their idea of real greatness out there! The bigger the noise, the bigger the thing that makes it. They've lived and acted on that plan for years out in Nebraska, and we'll just continue 'em on the same diet!"

"But suppose," said Goldsby, "that, after you get the world started to turn, and the people get onto what you are really doing, suppose that they rise up in rebellion and call you down! What then?" And he waited for a reply.

"What then?" responded Starleigh. "Yes, I say what then? What always happens in such cases? As Bill Nye used to say about the man who was shipwrecked, and the fact was not discovered till the next spring, 'It was then too late!' And when the people who have granted a blanket charter that has more in it than they dreamed of wake up to the real facts of the case, why, it is always too late for them. The thing is done, and what can they do about it? It takes two to make a bargain, and when it's once made, neither one party nor the other can break it alone without trouble. That's the uniform method of business, and always has been.

"What could the Nebraskans do?" he went on. "The very possible-most would be to get out an injunction, and what would that amount to? We could stave that off in the courts for a few

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days or weeks, and in the meantime we would go on with our pounding. Before they could possibly stop us we could get our rhythm established and our inertia, or momentum to going, and, the world once a-rolling, we would tell them the inevitable if things were left to run on as they were; namely, that the world would continue to turn that way unless *we* stopped it by a reverse force, and we could actually compel 'em, not only to dissolve the injunction, if they had finally made that stick, but make them pay us good money to turn our guns around and fire 'em the other way!

"I tell you," he continued, "the scheme is absolutely perfect; from start to finish it is without a flaw."

As though he had come to another brief resting place, Starleigh went to a window and looked down into the street below, his hands behind him. Goldsby took another drink, and relighted his cigar, which had gone out through neglect. In a few minutes Starleigh came back again, and was just about to resume, when Goldsby said:

"But suppose you do all this? Suppose you can pull the north pole over, or the place where the north pole is now, what good can come of it? Where's the money in it?" And he waited for a reply.

"My dear old man," exclaimed Starleigh, "do

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you suppose I'd ever think of broaching anything to you that there wasn't money in? Money in it? There's more money in it than there has ever been in all the schemes that have ever been worked on a stupid and unsuspecting public since time began. That's what I'm coming to, and that is where the scheme is beginning to get interesting. That's what all I have said, and all we shall do leads up to. It has taken me quite a while to get you to it, but I'm pretty sure I've got you there at last. You believe I can move the world, don't you?"

Goldsby said that he himself was no mechanic, but that he judged, from all that he knew about things mechanical, that the plan Starleigh proposed would work. Then Starleigh went on:

"Well, then, granted that I can turn the world, here's what's in it. Now I'm ready to talk business, and it is here that I'm counting on seeing you rise and shine. I'll plan and you perform. We've worked good schemes together that way before, and got good money out of 'em. If we work this one through, on the lines that I have laid down, we'll never need to work another. Just wait till I show you!"

He rose and went into his sleeping room, where Goldsby heard him unlock and open a trunk and take something out of it that seemed bulky and

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rather difficult to handle. Presently he reappeared, bringing in a large schoolroom globe, which he placed on the table in the center of the room. There were strips of paper pasted all over and around it, until the original surface was almost hidden from sight. He set it down carefully, gave it a twirl or two in an almost caressing manner, and then, turning to Goldsby, proceeded to unfold the rest of his plans.

"Come here till I show you," he said. "This globe will give you the location of everything we propose to set up or pull down.

"Now right here is Cherry County, Nebraska;" and he placed his finger on the proper spot upon the globe. "You will see that it is located almost exactly on meridian 100° west from Greenwich, and it is on that meridian, or in line with it, that we shall turn the world. Notice that it is just about halfway across the United States on a line from Boston to Portland, Oregon. That's the best place in all the world for us to locate our plant, as I'll show you.

"What we shall do will be to pull the earth right over towards ourselves when we stand in Cherry County, Nebraska, on the one-hundredth meridian. Of course we don't really pull the pole over, for that will keep its relative position in the solar system,—stay at a slant of twenty-three

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and one-half degrees to something or other, I've forgotten what. I don't care for that, though. But we don't want to pull the pole over. That would block our whole scheme. If we should really right the pole up to a perpendicular with the solar system we should merely put an end to the changes of seasons all over the world, and there wouldn't be a cent of money in that. That isn't at all what we want to do. What we will do will be just, as it were, to slip the pole right back down the line of the meridian that is numbered 100 on this side,—down the prolongation of that meridian on the other side. I'll show you what that is in a minute, but just stay on this side for awhile yet, so that you don't get mixed up.

“Now just see what a moving of the position of the north pole on the earth's surface will do. I propose to pull the world over exactly twenty-three and one-half degrees. That will put the point where the north pole now is down to where the Arctic circle at present crosses the 100th meridian, or about on the line of the north end of Hudson Bay. Of course doing that will move that point on the present Arctic circle down twenty-three and one-half degrees on our side, or just about to where Cherry County, Nebraska, is now. It will put Cherry County on the line of Monterey, Mexico, and push the line of the tropic of Cancer

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down to where the equator is at present. We'll make a new equator out of the old zone-line and so not change the landmarks too much. We don't want to do anything that isn't necessary, and we can save a little on the new survey there, as well as not! This will put the present equator on a line with Rio Janeiro, and shove the tail end of South America clear into everlasting ice and snow!

"There! That's just an outline of what it will do on our side. Now go over onto the other side, and see what we'll do there." And he shifted the globe to suit his words.

"Of course the extension of meridian 100° west is 80° east. I needn't stop to explain just how that comes about, but you can see on the globe that I'm right. I used to know the reason of it but I've forgotten just the ins and outs of it now. But anyhow, the globe shows it that way, and it's a standard school globe, so of course it's right. It's 100° west on one side and 80° east on the other.

"Now follow that 80° line down and see what you see. Of course we pull that side up as we pull our side down, as it were. That means that we'll put the present point where the 80th meridian east cuts the Arctic circle up to where the north pole is now. That will put St. Petersburg within about seven degrees of the new north pole, and

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if that don't cool off his royal highness, the Czar, then I don't know. But we'll talk of effects later. All I want now is to get you to see just what we'll do, looked at merely from a physical standpoint. The ethics of the deal will come further on."

He winked at the learned word, and continued:

"Follow the line down," he said. "We'll pull China up to beyond where Siberia is now, bring Calcutta up to the present latitude of London, slip the equator down to the end of the Cape of Good Hope and pull the south pole up into daylight. God only knows what we shall find when we get down there, but we'll pull it up to where we can get at it, and then we'll go down and see what's there, won't we, old man?" And he slapped Goldsby on the shoulder with a blow that nearly raised a blister.

CHAPTER II.

THE interview having now progressed far enough to reveal the leading features of the scheme "from a physical standpoint," as Starleigh put it, the two men addressed themselves to the consideration of what all this led up to.

"Now we'll get right down to business," said Starleigh, "for we've got the preliminaries out of the way so that we can see where we are. We'll take this side first, for it's nearest home," and he again appealed to the globe.

"Take the real estate phase of the scheme, to begin with! Did you ever notice the shape of North and South America on the map? Just see 'em here,—wedge-shaped, with the big ends of the wedges to the north. And just look how it is now! The great bulk of the real estate is where it doesn't do the human race a particle of good, for it can't be utilized! The big end of North America is so far north that it's all frozen up and the big end of South America is right under the equator. Now that's not an economical arrangement of real estate, looked at from a busi-

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ness standpoint. The part of the country where the most land is, ought to be the most available, most get-at-able! I don't want to set myself up as wiser than the party that originally arranged the land and water in the world, but I'll leave it to the crowd if my proposition isn't good sense!"

Goldsby shook his head at the "gall" or the modesty of the man, he hardly knew which to call it, while Starleigh went on:

"Now see what we'll do. We'll put the whole of the Dominion of Canada, and all of Alaska and Greenland down where you can get at 'em, or put 'em all into a climate that will be what the United States has now, and we'll move the great bulk of the land in South America down into the south temperate zone at the same time. Then all the waste land you'll have on this side of the world will be a part of Mexico and Central America, which we'll shove down under the equator, and which don't amount to very much anyhow, even as it is; and the tail end of South America we'll freeze up solid. These are all the tip ends of the continents though, which, according to the eternal law of the rights of the majority, ought to be willing to be sacrificed for the greatest good of the greatest number! You see the point, so I won't argue it, though maybe I'll say a word or two about it later on.

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"Now take the other side just for a minute. Of course we've got to pull some land clear up under the pole over there,—Siberia, and that sort of thing; but it's land that isn't worth so very much now, it's so cold up there, and all we'll do will be to just intensify what they've always had a good supply of in that region. But never mind about that; I'll straighten that all out for you when I come to the ethical part. Meantime, see what we'll do in Africa! We'll practically redeem that whole continent! There you've got another wedge of land, with the big end not available, the most of it stuck right down under the equator, and so located with regard to the trade winds and mountains that they don't have any rainfall. As a result they've got millions of acres that are now a desert—Sahara! We'll pull the great bulk of the whole business up into the north temperate zone and make a paradise out of it!

"So there you have the next point in the proceedings,—the real estate end of it, so to speak.

"As I figure it," he went on, "the world is made up, on the real estate side, of three wedges and a block. North and South America and Africa are wedges, Europe and Asia make a block. We shall improve the three wedges immeasurably by our deal, and while we shall damage the block a little, by what we do, yet it will have to stand

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it for the good of the cause. Look at it any way you're a mind to, and you'll see I'm right. It's a majority rule, take it any way you will. If you count noses, we've got three to two,—North and South America and Africa against Europe and Asia; and if that don't suit, and you ask for a show-down on area, we can beat 'em there too, for the three wedges can show up over 40,000,000 square miles as against a little over 20,000,000 square miles for the block,—almost two to one against 'em, and they do the counting! It's a majority either way, and the majority rules! So that settles that. We'll redeem more land than we tie up, twice over, and that's good enough for anybody."

Starleigh paused a few minutes just here, and the two men sat without speaking for a space. The noise of the street came up in an unbroken din through which the chiming of a near-by church-tower clock could hardly be heard. After they had rested awhile, Starleigh began again:

"Now I needn't tell you that one of the first things for us to do is to get an option on all this real estate that our move will bring into the market!"

The effect of this remark on Goldsby was almost electrical. The truth is that what he had listened to was so overpowering, so stupendous on

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its mechanical and physical sides, that his efforts to comprehend these had almost deprived him of the power of thought on familiar lines. But when Starleigh began to talk of bringing a new lot of real estate into the market, and of getting options on the same before the deal was made public, Goldsby was at home in an instant and felt that once more he breathed his native air. He almost shouted, "Starleigh, you're a brick!" and began eyeing the globe as if he should never look at anything else.

"How much is there of it? Have you figured it out?" he asked eagerly. "Show me those lines again! Who owns the stuff now? Say, great God, man, but you have done it this time! 'The world is ours!' I should say it was! The whole business, body and boots, and all there is therein! We'll get the whole thing by the scruff of the neck, and there won't be any power in heaven or earth or hell that can break our grip! Oh, but you're a good one! Talk about inspiration! You've had it, full strength, a million volts to the square inch of your gigantic brain. I swear, old man, I wonder it didn't kill you when it came to you, for it's all I can shoulder, even at second-hand, and getting it by degrees, as you've given it to me! Let's have some air!" he said, motion-

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ing towards a window, as he flung himself into a chair and breathed heavily.

Starleigh let down a sash and stood looking at his friend for awhile, as he lay half collapsed in the chair. Then he resumed:

"Begin to see something, don't you? I thought you would, when the time came! But don't go wild about it. You're the only man in the world, except myself, that has the least inkling of the situation, and if we can't hold it, between us, it ought to get away from us. But brace up now, and I'll tell you something more, for I haven't come to the really big thing yet!"

Goldsby stared.

"Oh, I haven't!" Starleigh went on. "I tell you, I'm loaded to the guards, this time, and I've been keeping back the really big thing till I felt you'd be able to hear it. But now, if you honestly feel as though you could sit through one more revelation, I'll proceed to show up."

Goldsby reached for the bottle, filled a glass to the brim, drank it at a gulp, and then said:

"Go on!"

"The really big thing to do, after we get our options on the real estate (and I might say, right here, that the real estate is only one of a number of things that we will get options on),—the really *big* thing is to organize a stock company, at the

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proper time, when we get everything ready, pool the whole business, issue stock up to the limit of the estimated value of the entire concern, and then——”

But he could go no further, for Goldsby was fairly beside himself, and Starleigh felt that to utter another word would drive the man to actual madness. The poor fellow gasped for breath and clutched the air wildly. The organizing and promoting of stock companies had been his specialty for years, and he had flattered himself that in some recent deals he had made he had well-nigh touched the limit of possibilities in that direction. But when he saw what Starleigh proposed, he felt that all he had heretofore done was as a grain of sand on an infinite shore. The very magnitude of the conception almost paralyzed him. He fell in a heap. He thrust out his palms as who should say, “For heaven’s sake, let up!” and sank into an almost helpless lump.

Starleigh was truly alarmed, for his former experience with Goldsby had revealed the fact that he was no faint-heart. He rushed into the bath room, dipped a towel in cold water, and bound it around Goldsby’s head. The bandage did its reviving work, and after a few minutes the dazed man pulled himself together and sat up. But he

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asked Starleigh to be quiet for awhile, at least, and so give him a "a chance to catch up."

"Take your time, old man," said Starleigh, "and when you get so that you can stand it, let me know, and we'll proceed. Let's go out and take a walk," he added presently. "We've got the thing where it'll hold now, and we can work out the rest of it by degrees."

Goldsby seconded the proposal, and for the next two hours or so they strolled about the city together. The familiar sights and sounds restored Goldsby to his habitual condition of body and mind, and when he at length felt fully himself again they returned to their quarters at the hotel.

"I'm all right now," he said to Starleigh, "and I believe I could go up against a proposition to appropriate the universe to our especial use without a blink. What an ass I was to let your simple proposition to take just this earth to ourselves floor me! Go on now, and if I wilt again, count me out of the deal, and find somebody to go with you who can hold up his end. But I'm with you now! Drive on!"

"Well, to take things up where we left 'em," said Starleigh, "the thing to do is to organize a stock company at the proper time, and issue stock up to the limit of estimated valuation. And I don't wonder that the idea of doing that knocked

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you out, for it pretty nearly paralyzes me, every time I get to figuring on it.

“For just see what there is in it. We’ve got the whole world to reorganize, and a chance to get in on the ground floor of every new enterprise that we can set going! There’ll be new railroads to build, and we’ll be the first parties on the ground for every one of ’em. We’ll run ’em where we’ve a mind to and stock ’em for anything we please. Our move will make thousands of miles of new telegraph lines necessary and they’ll be our meat, every mile of ’em. There’ll be hundreds of new gas companies to establish, new electric roads to build, new water works to set up, and we can get the first whack at all of them too. There’ll be thousands of new factories to build, and we’ll be in shape to get a bonus on every one of ’em, locating ’em where we can get the biggest rake-off from the towns that will bid on ’em.

“In fact, there isn’t a single trust or combine in the whole world to-day that we can’t bust to start on, and then force to come to us on the new deal! Oh, we’ve got the world, every foot of it!

“Now my notion is that we’ll just pool this whole business. We’ll make one grand consolidated trust out of all the trusts and pools and combines of the world, as it is now running, and then issue stock on the whole consolidated concern!

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Say, how is that for a scheme, anyhow? I swear there have been some pretty good ones before, by way of consolidation, but if I haven't knocked 'em all out, then I don't know what I'm about.

"How many millions can we issue on the whole outfit, old man?" he asked gaily.

"Millions?" replied Goldsby, the sweat standing out on his forehead. "Millions be damned! We can issue billions on it, trillions on it, and if there are any figures that go further round to the left on a numeration table we'll issue them full too. Oh, say, but this is heaven!"

"Pretty near it, anyhow, isn't it, old man?" returned Starleigh, his face all aglow. "And then, have you ever thought that we can get control of the stuff that goes into the concern for next to nothing, if we don't get a bonus on a good deal of it for taking it into our hands? Of course it will cost something to set up our plant and operate it, but that's a mere trifle to take out of the ultimate profits of the deal.

"Why, look at the real estate again. What do you suppose the big ends of all the three continents are worth now? Nothing! Absolutely nothing. In fact, I believe that, if we go before the proper legislative bodies that have the say-so as to what shall be done with this waste land that they control but get nothing out of, as things are now,—if we

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go before them and tell them that we have a scheme for redeeming these waste places, at least to a degree (we won't show them our full hand), we can get 'em to give up a big share of what we can recover, even if they won't put up a part of the expense incurred in doing it. You know the like has been done scores of times, and I believe it can be done again.

"Why, take South America. There's the whole valley of the Amazon, just one vast swamp as it is now, not worth a cent an acre; and yet it's the richest land in the world. Don't you suppose we can get the bulk of that given to us if we drain it and make it available for use? All we need to talk about in getting possession of it is draining it. We'll say nothing about the change in climate, which will add billions to its value. Nobody will ever dream of a change of latitude for it, and what nobody dreams of nobody else has to give away! We'll say we'll drain it, and we will."

"But I don't just see how you are going to do that,—to drain it," said Goldsby, knitting his brows. "I understand how you will change the climate, but what has that got to do with draining?"

"That's because you don't comprehend the whole scheme yet," replied Starleigh. "See here! Do you know what centrifugal force is? Makes

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things fly off, or away from the center, when they are whirled! You remember, don't you? All right!

"Well then, perhaps you remember too that the centrifugal force that comes from the turning of the earth on its axis is greatest at the equator?"

Goldsby nodded.

"All right. That makes the world bulge out at the equator and flattens it at the poles, so that the diameter of the earth at the equator is twenty-eight miles greater than it is at the poles. Twenty-eight miles on a diameter is fourteen miles for a radius. That is, it is fourteen miles further from the center of the world to the surface *now*, at the mouth of the Amazon River, than it is from the center to the point where the north pole at present sticks out. Centrifugal force makes it so. But if you remove that force, or change its location, there will be a corresponding change in the relative nearness or remoteness of all fluid bodies that that force acted on. Of course it won't affect the solid bodies. They'll stay put. When the world went flat at the poles it was all fluid; anyway, that's the way we learned it.

"Well, the centrifugal force of the rolling earth now makes the water on its surface bulge out fourteen miles at the mouth of the Amazon River, and that makes high water all through the valley. But

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if we move the mouth of that river down to the south temperate zone's north line, don't you see that we shall have it where the centrifugal force can't get in its work on it? The result will be that the ocean, at its mouth, will fall in and come nearer to the center of the earth,—centripetal force doing the business, you know; that is, the water will recede at that point! It can't help it! It won't go down fourteen miles, but it will lower from one to two miles, as I have it figured out. And if it does that, if the ocean will only get out of the mouth of the river, why of course the river can then empty itself enough to drain the whole valley, and there you are!

"We'll work the same deal on the Orinoco," he added, "only that isn't so big, you know. But we'll work it, all the same.

"So all we've got to say to the powers-that-be in Brazil and all the rest of the butt end of South America is that we have a scheme for draining the valleys of these great rivers, and making them available for the people's use (God bless the people!), and ask 'em for a fair share of what we redeem, for our trouble and expense. Do you think they won't give it to us? They'll give up all we ask. And we'll ask enough!" he declared with a knowing wink.

"So there you are for South America. Now

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come up a little and I'll show you something else. As I said, we'll put the new equator right through the center of the Gulf of Mexico,—run it a couple of hundred miles south of Key West, and almost through the center of Cuba, the long way of the island. And then what comes? Why, just as the water receded from the place where the equator used to be, when we moved that point down the line, just in the same proportion it will rise all along the new equator! That is, we'll raise the surface of the Gulf of Mexico from one to three miles! ”

“ But what'll become of Cuba in that case? ” exclaimed Goldsby, almost turning pale at what he foresaw.

“ It will be buried a mile or so under water! Teetotally sunk, never to rise again,—that is, unless in a million years or so the coral insects succeed in bringing it to the surface once more. But for the present, and so far as the modern world is concerned, it will be wiped off the face of the earth,” coolly replied Starleigh.

Goldsby stared and was almost staggered again, but Starleigh went on:

“ Now that seems a little tough at first blush, don't it? But when you come to look at it right, it isn't. It is the best thing that could possibly happen to that whole region. Any one who knows

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anything about the real situation down there will tell you that that's the honest truth. It's the easiest way to solve the Cuban business, reciprocity and everything else, and it will entirely remove the whole thing from current politics. Don't you suppose the President has wished, a thousand times, that he could get rid of the whole thing as easily as that,—just everlastingly sink it in the sea; and don't Congress and the whole country wish the same thing three times a day?"

"But the people of Cuba!" cried Goldsby. "You don't propose to drown all of them, do you? A man can do almost anything for the sake of business, but to deliberately drown several millions of people, that's going too far. Don't you think it is? Comes pretty near murder, don't it?" And he paused for a reply.

"Well," said Starleigh, "that depends! Mind, I don't say that we shall actually drown the entire population of Cuba, or even a small fraction of it. I don't believe there'll be any need of doing that. What I said was, that we'd sink Cuba, and all the rest of the West Indies. We'll bury the land, but we'll give the people fair warning before it goes down, and a chance to get out if they want to leave. That's fair, isn't it?"

Goldsby shook his head slowly as if somewhat in doubt, whereupon Starleigh remarked:

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“Why, see here! What’s struck you, old man? Weaken on a little thing like that? See here,—for we might as well argue the thing right out here as later. As I hinted awhile ago, just here is where the ethical part of the scheme comes in. And on an ethical basis, not in the line of business at all, I can prove to you that we’ll be justified in sinking the West Indies. We’ll settle that now because the same principle comes in in a lot of other moves we shall make, and I’ll clear the whole thing up at once. See here;” and he stood up to his full height as he spoke.

“Now the dictionary says that ethics is the science of the rules of human duty, and everybody knows that it is a fundamental principle in the science that the greatest good to the greatest number should always be considered as a duty to be performed, over and above everything else. Now that is the fundamental principle in this entire scheme of ours,—the greatest good to the greatest number! When we get the whole thing straightened out and squared around, as it were, we shall have infinitely improved the condition of the whole world and of all its inhabitants. As I’ve proved to you, we’ll vastly increase the amount of available real estate on the earth’s surface; and what’s more, we’ll locate it where the people that occupy it can advance and not stand still or go backward.

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“What’s the matter with Cuba, as things are now?” he went on. “It isn’t the people, but it’s their environment! The climate is such that no race that lives there can progress. There are two things that make this so. First, it is so infernally hot, nearly all the year round; and second, so many fruits and vegetables that will sustain human life grow wild down there, that so long as these hold out, you can’t get the natives to get up and hustle for a living. And if people don’t get up and hustle they won’t progress. That’s a law of nature. The whole history of the world proves that it’s true, and what all history proves is true you can’t beat.

“Why, what makes it so hard for Diaz in Mexico to-day? The prickly pear is the curse of Mexico. There are millions of acres of that plant in that republic, and the peons will never amount to anything till this native food supply is shut off. The stuff is both food and drink for ’em, and it grows just like weeds. For at least nine months in the year they can live on it by just going out and gathering it; and so long as they can do that they’ll never progress in any direction.

“And it’s largely the same in Cuba and all the West Indies. The environment is dead against ’em, and you’ll never get ’em to advance without you change the environment. That’s just what

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we'll do, and the end justifies the means, looked at from a strictly ethical standpoint."

"But where'll you put all the inhabitants of these islands?" asked Goldsby, almost in a daze.

"Move 'em to Greenland!" responded Starleigh, in a tone of triumph. "We'll have Greenland moved down so that most of it will be in the north half of the temperate zone. We'll move 'em there. There'll be no wild fruits there to keep 'em alive, and the climate will be such that they'll have to get up and hustle to keep from starving to death. That'll do more for those people in ten years, after we make the change, than all the schools and missionaries you could cart down to 'em where they are now could do for 'em in a century. Now don't you see the philanthropic side of the scheme? I tell you, it's the biggest thing in that line that the world ever saw."

He fairly beamed as he said this.

"Of course," he went on, "some of the folks down there may be lost in the shuffle, but that's simply according to the ways of nature. What great change in nature did anybody ever see that didn't cause the loss of millions of lives? Why, the tops of the Rocky Mountains are full of the fossils of animals that were swimming in the sea when those mountains were thrown up. They got caught in the crush, and had to take the conse-

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quences! But you'll admit that it was the best thing, take it all in all, that the Rocky Mountains should be thrown up, and not lie stuck in the mud at the bottom of the ocean forever just to accommodate a lot of sea-worms and other low forms of life! I tell you, it's the way of nature always that when you try to make the low high, a big per cent of what you're trying to raise will be wiped out in the deal. That's the way of nature, and you won't go back on nature, will you? For going back on nature is going back on nature's God, and even a preacher wouldn't do that!

"No, sir!" he said, "the scheme is all right, look at it any way you will."

He took another turn around the room, then resumed:

"But we'll give the Cubans and the rest of 'em down there a chance for their lives. We'll advertise in all the papers what's going to happen, and give 'em a fair chance to get out. And if they won't take our word for it, and get out, we shan't serve 'em any worse than the people were served who wouldn't take Noah's word for it when he told 'em to get in out of the wet. Oh, we've got good precedents for every move we make."

"But how can we move so many?" asked Goldsby.

"Easy enough!" replied Starleigh. "And

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there we are again. There's where another fortune comes our way! These people have got to move, and we know it before they do. All we've got to do, to make 'em pay us our own price for moving 'em, is to get control of all the steamship lines before they get onto what's coming, and we've got 'em! The thing's been done a good many times, in a small way before,—it's one of Stonyboy's old gags,—but it's a good one, all the same.

"We won't rob 'em entirely; there isn't any use in being altogether too brash, but we'll have 'em where we can make our own rates, for they've got to go or die, and we'll have the only means of their getting away. That's good financial management, and the principle, in a business way, is as old as the hills.

"But we can't go into all the details now," said Starleigh, as though he were wearied by the very magnitude of what would come to be. "We'll figure out a lot of these things as we go along. Let's take a rest now, and continue it in our next, as the papers say."

But Goldsby wouldn't have it so, at least not for a while yet, and asked:

"But what about Florida, and the whole part of the United States along the Gulf coast? Will you sink that too?"

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"Sure!" replied Starleigh, without a blink. "We've got to do it! And there's another point; I don't care to bring it up now, but since you've got onto it, we'll see what's in it. We will sink the whole southern coast of the United States, and, what's more, we'll serve the whole eastern coast and the western coast in the same way! We'll do this for two reasons. In the first place, we can't help it if we would; and in the second place, we wouldn't help it if we could! And let me show you why we wouldn't. We couldn't afford to!

"We're bringing an almost measureless amount of new real estate into the market, aren't we? When do you suppose we'd ever unload it if we didn't create a market for it? Not for ages. Not till you and I would be dead and gone, buried and turned to dust for a thousand years! What we've got to do is to *make a market* for what we've got to sell. That's business, and it's an old story in business, too.

"Why, what did England do when she found she could raise scads of opium in India, but had no market for it? She made a market for it, that's all. She found that the Chinese took to opium like ducks to water. They wanted the drug, and England wanted they should have it. That's a fair bargain! And when a few squeamish high

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mogul Chinese kicked up a row about it, on the ground that the opium trade was demoralizing the whole nation, what did England do? She just said, 'Demoralizing be damned! We've got opium to sell and your people want to buy it, and it's a go. It's none of your business, or ours either, what comes of the deal. Don't get gay! Say another word, and we'll do you!' or words to that effect. And they did 'em, too! They turned their war-ships loose on 'em, and after a few thousand Chinese had bit the dust they gave in. And now China takes her medicine, right and regular, and England gets the rake-off.

"Oh, we're all right. There isn't a single move in this whole lay-out that we can't justify by history and good hard business common sense. And it all works out for the best, too. Why, just see what came out of the Chinese opium war. That deal may not look exactly square to the kid-gloved, but see what it led to. By forcing it through, the English everlastingly opened up China for trade to the whole world, not only for opium but for everything else.

"You see," he continued, "you've got to take these things in this world for all there is in 'em not condemn 'em on a part of the evidence. You've got to take 'em as a whole. The opium war led to good results, on the whole,—the best results the

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world has ever seen. So we'll make a market for our real estate by knocking out the supply already on hand.

"Then there's another way that I can prove that our deal is good business. It's a sound business principle to crush competition if it hurts you. What's the whole idea at the bottom of a protective tariff but to crush foreign competition? Everybody knows that if you've got a competition that won't let you run full time and full force, the thing to do is to do up your competitor. That's the principle now and it's always been so.

"Why, don't you remember how old Prof. Billsbury used to ding into us about Rome and Carthage, the Punic Wars, and all that sort of thing? Old What's-his-name, he kept telling us, used to wind up every speech with '*Delenda est Carthago!*' Carthage must be destroyed. You remember how Prof. used to say it over and over.

"Now what was the matter with Carthage? She was a competitor, that's all. She sold goods in the Roman market, and when she wouldn't let up, the only thing left was to wipe her off the map! And if we let New York and Philadelphia and Boston and all the rest of those cities stay where they are, we can't turn a wheel. They'll be in competition with their stock of real estate. But

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clean 'em out, wipe 'em off the earth, and we're made. That's what's in it, and it's got to be done. Oh, I haven't been lying awake nights for two months for nothing, and don't you forget it!"

"What about Chicago?" faltered Goldsby.

"Goes with the rest of the lot!" replied Starleigh. "Centrifugal force will raise the Great Lakes about half a mile, and that'll fix Chicago and all the other big towns located on 'em.

"Sorry to see 'em go," he added, "but we can't help it. They are simply in the way of progress on the new deal, and so they'll have to go under. It wouldn't be fair or just to the rest of mankind to suppress our scheme just to accommodate Chicago! Besides, we can't afford to do it, and we won't do it.

"And they wouldn't ask us to either, Chicago folks wouldn't, if they saw the whole thing from beginning to end. I'll bet a horse that there isn't a big business man in Chicago that would even think of asking us to weaken if he knew all there was in it. He might want us to let him in on the ground floor, but he'd never dream of begging us to quit!

"No sir, they're game in Chicago! They like to see a big thing well carried out. They'd prefer to be in it, if they could; but even if they can't,

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they want to see it win, anyhow, even if they do get squeezed in the deal. We'll bury Chicago and Cleveland, and all the rest of 'em. We simply have to do it.

"But see what else we'll do! See what we'll do for navigation on the lakes. We'll raise the ocean at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River a mile or so, set the water back enough to cover Niagara Falls so deep that you can sail right over 'em as though they weren't there, and just see what a help that'll be!"

"Where'll you put these folks from Chicago and Cleveland, and all the rest?" inquired Goldsby, somewhat anxiously.

"Well, we won't have to locate them as we shall have to locate the Cubans. They've got something for heads besides just nubs on the top ends of their bodies. Let 'em go where they want to. We'll have plenty of first class real estate to offer 'em, and we'll make prices to suit,—the Company will. We won't be too hard on 'em, only just enough to let 'em know how it feels to be squeezed.

"And they'll have no cause to complain, for we'll give 'em ten times as much land to pick from as they ever had before, and lots better places to locate their cities in than they have now.

"Besides that, we can put the cities where they ought to be, under the new arrangement,—pick out

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our own ground, as it were. And we won't stick the next to the biggest city in the country right down in a swamp, either! Why, just see the millions that have had to be spent to raise Chicago out of the mud! We'll put all our big towns up high and dry, so that they can have natural drainage without having to dig a ditch forty miles long through solid rock and up hill all the way, to get rid of their sewage. We'll do the thing right, while we're at it, and receive the everlasting thanks of future generations for what we've done!

"Then there's Alaska," he went on. "We'll pull that down to warm weather, and thaw the whole territory out from top to bottom. That'll free untold millions of gold that is now frozen up in the ice, without the expenditure of a cent extra. As the ice thaws the gold will sink to the bottom and all we'll have to do will be to scrape it up and coin it, and that'll everlastingly fix the gold standard so that it can never be bilked again.

"This Alaska deal," he continued, "is such a close result of the work of our plant, without any manipulation, that I don't know as the profits of it ought to go into the Company, or just come to you and me. But we can settle that later. Never mind about that now.

"The point is that when we get Alaska thawed out, and the gold out of it, it will make the finest

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place in the world for big cities,—that and northern Canada, the Hudson Bay country, and all around up there. All we've got to do is to press the button, and they'll do the rest."

Goldsby heaved a sigh, as though the weight of the world were settling on his shoulders, for he foresaw that to exploit this part of the project would fall to his share of the enterprise. He put up his hands deprecatingly again, but Starleigh never noticed his appeal for respite.

"So much for this side of the world," he said. "Now take a look at the other! Oh, don't weaken! I won't go into detail much over there; just give an outline, that's all.

"As I said, we'll freeze up Russia till her population will have to move, and we'll put them all into what is now the Desert of Sahara. We'll move that up into a desirable locality, and give the Russians a change of climate that will be good for their souls as well as their bodies. Too much cold has made the Russians abnormal, just as too much heat has hurt the Cubans. We'll put 'em where the environment will be just right, and that'll settle it. They won't have any seaport, to be sure, but they never have had any, and so are used to that sort of thing, and won't have any cause to kick. We'll do as well by them in that

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line as they were done by before, and what more could you ask?

"We'll move the Germans up a little further into cold weather, but they are so full of blood that they can stand that without hurting 'em. Then the Chinese——"

But Goldsby once more raised his hands, palms to the fore, as though he would push the whole scheme from him, and cried:

"For God's sake, let up! I can't, I simply can not go on further this time! Leave something for to-morrow. Take up the Chinese some other day and go on from there, but don't put 'em on me now. There is a limit to what flesh and blood can bear!"

"All right!" exclaimed Starleigh. "We'll let the subject rest on that line, and resume later, as the books say. But you can stand it to talk on another line, I know, especially if I take you where you're at home.

"Now what I want *you* to do," he went on to say, "is to take charge of, and work up all this franchise business. You've done that from your youth up, and you can beat the world at it. I can plan that sort of thing well enough, but I can't work it out worth a cent. That's why I sent for you, and why I want to let you in, share and share

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alike, on the whole deal, because I know what you can do."

Goldsby was refreshed by this change of base, and after a few moments' reflection, he said:

"I can do it, though it's going to be a little hard to start the thing. Haven't got so very much to trade on, to begin with. But we'll start it all right. We shall probably have to throw the concern into the hands of a receiver and get rid of the first mortgage bonds and all original indebtedness that way before we get our plant to running. But that's nothing new. Nearly every big business enterprise in the country has been obliged to do the like of that once or twice before it got on to its feet. The indorsement of the Nebraska legislature will give us enough backing to issue the first lot of bonds on, and after that a receivership will pull us through.

"But after we get the ball to rolling, as it were, then it'll be great sailing! Just wait till we get to issuing stock on the whole consolidated concern, and then you'll see me get in my work! Lord, think of it! I'll go to New York, right down onto Wall Street, and I'll say to the gang who think they know it all: 'We're going to turn the world topsy-turvy. We're going to do up everything that there is now in the world and begin all over again. We've restocked the whole

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outfit, and we own it all. We'll sell you stock at par, as a special favor. Come in on that basis or die! It's all there is left. Take it, and save yourselves on what you'll lose when the flood comes!' Say, isn't it great? Won't it make life worth living to be able to put the screws to Wall Street like that?" And he took an extra drink to do the subject justice.

Starleigh lay back and laughed to see Goldsby take wing.

"Oh, you'll do it all right! You're the man for the place!" he said. "But as you say," he continued, "hadn't we better adjourn this meeting and take it up later? Of course we've only touched the edge of the possibilities so far; but we've got the ground laid out and we can think the rest out as it turns up."

Goldsby was anxious to go on, in a way, but he was also weary from their long and arduous conference, so he yielded to Starleigh's proposition. They went down and took a hearty supper, and then went to the play.

It was late at night when they returned to their rooms, and they were both thoroughly tired out; so without a word concerning what was uppermost in their minds, they went to bed in their respective rooms on opposite sides of the parlor.

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Starleigh was just dropping off to sleep, when Goldsby called across:

"If you sink Boston and New York and Philadelphia and New Orleans and Chicago and San Francisco, that will bankrupt every trunk line of railroad in the country, won't it?"

"Sure!" exclaimed Starleigh, rousing himself reluctantly.

"Then what's to hinder our getting into the market a few days before the crash comes and going short on the stock of the whole outfit,—every road in the country, yes, and Western Union and all the trusts in the country thrown in, and begging the Street from Trinity Church to East River?"

"Sure!" growled Starleigh. "But go to sleep now! Go to sleep! We'll fix all those little things as we come to them!"

So they slept.

CHAPTER III.

IT was a full six months after their first interview before the prime movers in this gigantic scheme for the systematic betterment of the condition of the whole human race and the incidental enrichment of themselves met for further conference. During all that period they had not been idle, nor could it be said that they had made haste. Great events take time for their fulfillment; and an almost limitless knowledge of and care for details is necessary for their successful exploitation.

It was these things that occupied them both, meantime.

And now they were once more in their natural environment,—a hotel in which they could put their trust, where they were known and not known, where every luxury of life could be had for a consideration and no remarks made, where porters or bell-boys would do any service for a commensurate tip, and look the other way always and continuously.

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For of such is the kingdom of the promoter!

It is worthy of note also that for the half year they had been separated they had scarcely exchanged a word with each other either by letter or telegram. It is a fundamental principle of their kind to put nothing down in black and white.

"Never write a letter," was the advice a great politician once gave to a henchman. "Ride ten thousand miles to see your man, if you have something confidential that you must say to him; see him, and say what you have to say, and then take the first train for home. But don't ever put a pen-and-ink club into any man's hands that he can some day brain you with, if things come his way and not yours."

In the light of which saying it is clearly apparent that the pen is not only mightier than the sword, but infinitely more dangerous.

Anent this idea of great deals being consummated without the aid of pen and ink,—it was a great revelation to the rank and file when a railroad magnate in this country testified before the Commission that an enterprise involving hundreds of millions of dollars had actually been carried through, from start to finish, on the basis of an "agreement" that was never reduced to writing, but was "just mutually understood."

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"And the agreement was kept," he said, "in every particular."

Just what that agreement was, none but the parties thereto can ever know, though its content affected the lives and well-being of the people of two continents. There be those who say it was none of their business, these people of two continents; yet in many cases their all was involved in the terms of that agreement which they could never learn the scope and nature of.

And he is not a bad man, the gentleman who gave this testimony. He is the kindest of neighbors, and his good deeds of charity and beneficence are world-famous.

Truly, we are all spotted!

"Well, how goes it, old man?" Starleigh said, as he dropped back into the arms of the great chair once more, and fell into the pose of solid comfort and luxurious ease.

"Oh, I'm getting there," Goldsby replied, "though I've had a time of it, up one road and down another, hunting up legislators out in the wild and woolly West, and finding out who's who, and what's what. I tell you, it's like walking on eggs, making overtures to those fellows these days. They are as full of suspicion as their prairies are of wind, and they can scent a scheme further than Marconi's sensitive points can feel a vibration."

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"Why, I'd always thought they were rather a stupid lot out there," Starleigh interposed, while Goldsby poured a glass.

"And that is just where you are most gloriously fooled," Goldsby returned with a good deal of warmth, as he recalled the experiences of five months of skirmishing. "Did you ever stop to think who the people are that settled Nebraska?" he went on, after he had swallowed what he had poured out a minute before.

"I don't know as I ever thought much about it," said Starleigh. "Somehow I had a kind of a general idea, I don't know just how I got it, that the people out there were a sort of boorish lot, good enough in their way, but not particularly bright, or quick. Something after the style of a Norman horse, you know." And he laughed at the comparison.

"Well, don't you ever take a Nebraskan for that sort of an animal, or you'll get most beautifully left!" exclaimed Goldsby. "I tell you, Starleigh, old man, they are sharper than tacks, and we might as well understand, right here and now, that the toughest proposition we've got to go up against in this whole deal is to work it through in the state of Nebraska. If there was any other place in all God's green earth but Cherry County, that would at all do for working the

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scheme, I'd go there and thank heaven for the way of escape. But I've been out and looked the ground over, and so far as location is concerned that county is not only a paragon,—it's a paradise! ”

He paused for a minute, quite carried away with his own eloquence in view of the splendid opportunities offered by the spot chosen for the scene of their great enterprise. Then he resumed:

“ But I tell you, we've got to mind our eyes, seven days in the week, if we win out in that state. You see,” he went on, “ it was the cream of the East that settled the West. It was the men who couldn't be ‘ cribbed, cabined and confined,’ as I remember Shakespeare says, who struck out into pastures new. They were the men who had the expansion fever in their blood before the rest of the folks in the nation knew that there was such a disease. They lit out for something, they didn't exactly know what,—it's the unknown quantity in expansion that always makes it so attractive,—and they found something worth having, almost before they knew it. They bungled it for awhile, but they've got onto it now, and they don't propose to let it get away from 'em. They are bright, sharp, and clear-headed. They have all the alertness that results from frontier life, and there is a sort of intuitive refinement

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about 'em, a remnant of their eastern origin, I guess it is, that crops out when you get close enough to 'em, or down into 'em far enough to strike it, that is far and away beyond what one would expect to find in any such surroundings as one meets out there.

“Why, I took dinner one day in a sod house that you'd think only a barbarian could live in, and yet you ought to see what it really held. I found a man and his wife who were fit to shine in any society I was ever in in my life. The husband was a young chap from Boston, a graduate of Harvard, and his wife was a Wellesley girl. The poor devil had bad lungs, and would have been dead years before if he'd stayed east. But they've got the greatest cure for consumption the world ever saw out on those Nebraska plains, and these folks found it out, and took it in. Why, a consumptive microbe can no more live in a Nebraska wind than a codfish could thrive on the top of the State House in Boston. It dries 'em up, curls 'em up, knocks 'em out body and boots, and that's all there is of it. I tell you, Nebraska's bound to be one of the first states in the Union, for she's got a thousand things up her sleeve that folks in general haven't dreamed of yet.”

“You'll be wanting to go out there to live while we do our bombarding, the first thing you know,”

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Starleigh interjected, while Goldsby paused to cross his legs the other way over.

"Well, I might do worse," that gentleman replied, "and I'll tell you what,—anyhow, I've got so stuck on the air they have out there that if I thought this scheme of ours would knock it off the face of the earth I'll be damned if I shouldn't almost feel like weakening on the whole business! I tell you——"

But Starleigh cut him off with a look of horror that nearly froze his blood. For so much was that gentleman's scheme for overturning the world a part of himself that even a hint as to its possible miscarriage almost threw him into a fit. Goldsby sprang forward and grasped his hand and held it hard as he explained:

"But don't you ever think it, old man; we can make the change and save the climate too. The only thing I care to talk to you about is how we can work the thing out with those folks on the ground. To do that will take the best we've got in the shop, and we want to be right after it, the sooner the quicker."

Upon which return to the subject, Starleigh resumed a sane and eager position in his chair, and Goldsby went on:

"Well, I believe I'd better take time to tell you the whole thing in detail, as far as I've got, and

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see if you can find anything that looks like going wrong or shows signs of a leak," he said.

Starleigh nodded approval, and the other proceeded:

"I really got my first tangible idea as to just how to move out as a result of that dinner in that sod house. Did you ever see one of those sod houses?" he asked, as the memory of the event came over him with all its gracious charm, its thorough freshness and originality. Probably the striking contrast between that house on the plains and the ultra-luxurious surroundings by which they were conditioned as they talked tended to throw the former into high relief in his fancy. In any event, he couldn't resist the temptation to tell a little more about it.

"You see, they make 'em out of prairie sod," he said. "They cut great slabs of the stuff, a few feet square and a few inches thick, and pile 'em up like bricks. They make the walls of the house about four feet thick and as high as they care to. They leave square holes for doors and windows, about the regular size, and box 'em round with boards, and put regular doors and windows in 'em. Then they put some beams, or rafters, overhead, and lay boards on these, and then sod the roof a couple of feet thick or so. The whole thing looks like a square pile of dirt with a few dry

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goods boxes set into it, like the shooting-holes of a fort. They are awfully ugly to look at, but they are warm in winter and cool in summer, and I never saw a cosier place in my life than the inside of the one I'm telling you about. It was divided off into rooms that were separated by sod partitions, and the inside walls were first plastered with mud and then covered with a sort of hard-finish whitewash that was as white as chalk.

"The woman had her piano in one room, and all around on the wall behind it she had photographs of her class, taken graduation day, and all that sort of thing. You'd never have dreamed that such a thing was possible from the outside look of the house; but I tell you you'd better look on the inside of everything, out there, before you form your final conclusions about it.

"Well sir, that woman set up a dinner that was fit for a king. When you put western necessity on top of eastern training and ingenuity, you've got a combination that's hard to beat. You take women that are born west and have grown up there and never been anywhere else, and they're a little raw, the best of 'em; but get one that got her first squint at daylight in New England, and grew up there, and didn't get spoiled in the makin'—didn't spindle up and run all to spectacles and philosophy and dead languages and that sort of

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thing—and transplant her into the West where she's just got to do things, and then you've got a woman that is a woman. There isn't anything better anywhere in the world, that I've ever seen."

"Good thing this woman was married," Starleigh put in.

"Oh, come off!" Goldsby retorted as he went on:

"I was just a stranger to 'em, but they saw that I'd seen a thing or two, and it kind of brought back the old times, I guess, to entertain me. Anyhow, they did the hospitality act up in great shape, and incidentally they put me onto the details of the first act in our play.

"You see, the thing that bothered me was to get an excuse for nosing around out there that would be beyond suspicion. What I had to do was to hunt up the fellows that were going to the legislature and get acquainted with 'em and size 'em up before the legislature met. I tell you, the game of boodle is n't near as easy to play as it used to be. Folks say the world is growing worse all the time. I don't know how that is; but I do know that it is getting slicker and slicker, every day. You can't come at things on a straight shoot any more, if you expect to win out. Unless you cover your dope with a sort of angel-of-light coating that would fool Gabriel himself, you'll never get there.



"I've found my man at last!" Page 79.

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Why, you let one of those Nebraska fellows even suspect that you are trying to bribe him, and that settles it. You can't get near him with a rod-pole. And we've got to get near 'em, and that's just where it is.

"So what kept me awake nights was to get on to some scheme as an excuse for being where I was and doing what I was, that would put 'em off my trail beyond peradventure. And I got my idea from this Boston man. He had a cough that was a corker. His consumption was knocked out, but he still had the cough. So I got the consumption idea,—that I was a victim, and was touring Nebraska to get rid of the disease, and I took lessons in coughing from this man that I took dinner with. I'd talk to him awhile, and listen to the way he coughed, and then I'd make some excuse to get away from him and get off by myself and practice on the thing while it was fresh in my mind and the sound of it was in my ears, you understand."

Starleigh laughed, a loud, long laugh, at the grim humor of Goldsby's confession, but that gentleman went on:

"Oh, you can laugh, old man, but I can tell you it's really no laughing matter. What we've got to do is to arrive. And we can't arrive without the help of the Nebraska legislature; and we

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can't get its help without the votes of its members, and the members won't vote as we must get 'em to vote, if we're to win, unless we get up close to 'em, somehow or some other how, and there you are again. I haven't got any more use for the consumptive cough than you have, but if we're going to get there we've got to have something to get there with, and that cough was the best thing I could find to break a way with. In the first place it calls attention to you without an introduction, and then it excites sympathy for you, which is no small card in the game of boodle, I can tell you. Then it allays suspicion, which is just what we need in our deal. Folks, take 'em as they go, can't realize that it's possible for a man who's got a death rattle in his throat to be working a scheme that's got a lot of fire and brimstone in it."

"There isn't any fire and brimstone in what we propose to do," Starleigh interposed a little hotly.

"Well, some folks that can't see the end from the beginning might think there was, especially at some stages of the proceedings," Goldsby replied. "Anyhow, it's a safe thing to allay suspicion, don't you think so?"

"Sure!" Starleigh assented. "Don't think for a minute that I was criticizing what you've done; on the contrary, I marvel at your ingenuity. There isn't one man in a hundred millions that could or

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would get onto as clever a scheme, and I know it. That's why I chose you of all the men I ever knew to work the deal for me. And you'll do it; you'll do it to a finish!" And he slapped his friend on the knee,—a hearty and faith-confirming slap.

This bit of approval put Goldsby in good humor again, and he continued to unfold the plot. He pulled himself together and proceeded to cough once or twice in a manner that showed he had rare abilities as a mimic, and suggested that he might have made a successful actor, of the modern "stunt" sort, had he turned his talent in that direction earlier in life.

Starleigh laughed again, this time uproariously, and then said:

"Out of sight! Out of sight, old man! You do the act to perfection. But you don't look the part worth a cuss," he added, as if he detected a flaw in the proceedings, or at least feared that some one else might do so.

"Oh, don't you fret about that," Goldsby replied. "I've looked after that, too. Folks aren't always skinny when they have throat and lung troubles. It ends that way, but mine hasn't gone that far yet. I've got a case of incipient chronic bronchitis. How's that for schedule time on a high sounding phrase?" he added with a laugh in which Starleigh joined.

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“ Well, the upshot of it all is that I’ve been touring Nebraska with a cough and a livery team for a little more than three months. I began before election,—got at it just as soon as the nominations were made,—and I hung to ’em till it was all over, and awhile after that. I went up against ’em on both sides, or rather on all three sides, ‘ Pop,’ Democrat, and Republican, and if I haven’t seen some things that would turn a man’s hair gray then my name isn’t Goldsby. They’ve got the worst and the best in all parties out there, and I’ve seen ’em all.

“ It’s a great place for old political hacks that have had their day further east, have played the game and lost, and are now looking for a new deal. Some of ’em are the worst lot I ever struck, but one doesn’t want to waste much time with them or their likes. They are the fellows that can be bought cheap, any time; and if they have to be had, it’s only a few minutes’ work to gather ’em in when they are needed.

“ But I tell you, there’s some awfully good political timber floating ’round with all this rubbish. I honestly believe I’ve heard more real good, hard, political sense talked in Nebraska in the last three months than I ever heard before in all my life.

“ Did you ever think,” he went on, “ why it is that Nebraska has been a sort of storm center for

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all political economy issues; how it is that nearly all the great questions along these lines, for the last fifty years, have started in either Nebraska or Kansas, which is about the same thing?"

"Never thought anything about it," Starleigh replied. "And I don't care a damn about it, either," he added, so impatient was he to hear only those things that pertained to their deal. But Goldsby was not to be put down, and he continued:

"Yes, there you go again! That's your weakness, old boy. That's why you've never been able to work out a single one of the schemes you've originated. You aren't willing to get down to details and to take time to work 'em out, to the last farthing. You think you can take a bucket full of boodle and go out to Lincoln and throw it out as you would a lot of corn to a yardful of geese, and that the members of the legislature will swallow your bait and do your bidding. But I can tell you there's no such snap as that lying around for us to pick up. We've got to get down and study every inch of the ground we have to travel, and to know the whole spirit of the people we're trying to do up.

"But I've been through the whole list," he continued. "I've seen 'em all, and if I haven't sized 'em up for about what they are worth, the whole

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'caboodle,' then I've lived my half century in this gay and festive world in vain."

There was that in his tone which conveyed that he was in no wise troubled by any doubt as to whether his life so far had been a success or a failure, and he looked the very embodiment of self-approval as he spoke. He paused for an instant, as if waiting for something before he went further. Then he arose and walked to the window and stood there for some minutes, looking down into the street. Starleigh sat in his chair and watched him, but said never a word.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Goldsby turned his face toward his partner, a moment later, he looked as though he had been transfigured. His whole body seemed to vibrate, and there was a thrill in his look that caused the man who witnessed it to catch his breath. He walked rapidly up to Starleigh, trembling with suppressed emotion, and burst out:

“But the best thing about it all is, that I’ve found my man at last!”

His eyes gleamed with a supernatural light as he made this announcement, which was to him the very climax of all that had been done thus far. His faith in his discovery was so great that the joy of sharing it with another was unspeakable. He had held the glad news until now with the greatest difficulty, for it had been the uppermost thing in his mind for weeks. He had hugged himself, mentally, scores of times, over his achievement; had chucked himself under the chin and winked the other eye at himself, so to speak, again and again, for his cleverness. And now he had told what

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he had found, had placed himself where another could share in the admiration of the chief actor in this momentous move forward in the proceedings. He stood silent for a moment, beaming triumphantly on Starleigh, who was still held spell-bound by the enthusiasm of the man. Then he continued:

"I've found our man, the very man in all the world to do what we want done." His tone was lower and he spoke more deliberately, now that the first burst of exultant revelation was past.

"But I don't want to take too much credit for the find," he added, somewhat apologetically, as though he feared he had overshot the mark a trifle by his show of fervor. "It was almost as much luck as anything else, my coming onto him. All I give myself credit for is for recognizing the situation when it came to me. I tell you, Starleigh, old boy, it ain't so much providence that pushes folks along in this world as it is having the ability to see and pick up what comes their way. I've seen scores of mighty clever folks that 'ud let a good thing get away from 'em because they couldn't see quick enough that it really was a good thing, and that they ought to grab it quick. But I got a mighty good lesson along that line almost before I was out of petticoats. Did I never tell you about that?" he asked, as he sat down again.

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Now that his great announcement had been made, he seemed in no hurry to hasten their further direct consultation. Starleigh said that he had never heard the story to which Goldsby referred, and he went on:

“When I was a boy about five or six years old, one day there was a man came riding down the street, in front of my father’s house, on a great big stallion. We lived in a little country town, and I was playing out on the sidewalk. The fellow’s hat blew off, just as he got to where I was, and he was afraid he couldn’t get onto the horse again, if he got off to get it; so he asked me to pick it up and hand it to him. But I was afraid. I always was timid, and my bump of caution has always been bigger than a goat; so I stood there like a little fool and cried, and didn’t dare to do what he asked me to.

“Finally he went down into his pocket and pulled out a quarter and told me he’d give it to me if I’d pick up his hat and give it to him. That pretty near did the business, for a quarter was a big thing to me those days; but before I could quite nerve myself to the sticking point, Charley Rowe, a little cuss a year younger than me, came swinging down the street, and the man on horseback tackled him for the job, and offered him the

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quarter. Quicker'n a flash Charley grabbed up the hat, handed it up, and got the money.

"Well, sir, after that I'll bet I went out and stood by the road more'n a hundred hours, looking for another man to come down the street on a stallion and offer me a quarter to pick up his hat. But he never came. When I grew up, the thing came to me, and I made a vow that hereafter nothing should get away from me that came my way. And I've always thanked God that I learned the lesson young!"

They laughed over the story, and then Starleigh said:

"Well, tell me about your man."

"I was just coming to him," Goldsby replied, "but I had to tell you that story when it came to me. What a damned fool I was, wasn't I? But I've done falling down that way, thank heaven."

"The man's name is Goodpasture, Jonathan Goodpasture. Funny name, isn't it? But he'll make good pasture for us before we're through with this thing, or I don't know what's what."

"He was born and raised in Ohio. He's about fifty-five years old now, and he's seen a good deal of the world, take it up one road and down another. He used to be a preacher, but he got by that before he was thirty; that is, preachin' for

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a regular deal. He takes a turn at it once in awhile now, but it's because he wants to, and not for grub. It makes a hell of a difference the way a fellow does a thing, what he does it for, whether it's for love or for money."

And then both men were silent for an instant, as though they were thinking about something, or as if some one spoke. But the mood passed quickly, and Goldsby continued:

"He's a fine looking cuss, six feet in his socks, weighs about a hundred and eighty, straight as a line, hair iron gray and plenty of it, an eye like a hawk, and a nose that humps itself up in the middle in such a way that it makes a man feel that he'd better get out of the road if it was headed towards him, strong. Give me a man with a hump nose if you want to get business done. I remember hearing a lecturer say once, that nature never trusted a big load on the shoulders of a man with a sway-backed nose. He wasn't much of a lecturer, but he was mighty right on that score.

"But I needn't go into details," he went on to say. "The fact is, he's the best all round man I ever saw. He's a man fit to be President of the United States, and yet, there he is, away out on the edge of eternal dry weather, and all on account of his luck. The game has played against

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him, every move he's made, ever since he was a kid; and yet he ain't knocked out a little bit, and is one of the cheerfulest men I ever talked to in my life."

"Don't it beat the devil how the game will play against some folks? Goodpasture told me all about his ups and downs. I got right up next to him, and we told each other all about everything that ever happened to us, like a couple of school-girls.

"Oh, you've got to do it," he hastened to explain, as Starleigh's face darkened a little, indicating a fear of confidences, a thing he had always lived in mortal terror of. "But don't you ever fear that I coughed up anything that would put him on to the true inwardness of what we're working now. Not much! In all the hours we've spent together exchanging confidences, I never leaked a drop. Oh, no! I'm too old a hand at the grindstone for that. But it'll all come in time. What you've got to do first is to lay a foundation for subsequent proceedings. Rome wasn't built in a day, and you can't get into a man's holy of holies, so that you can make him yours, body and boots, in any day or two,—that is, any man that's got a holy of holies worth gettin' into. But I'm headed towards the secret place of his

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Almighty, and if we don't take possession for our benefit before we're through, then I'll resign."

"What's his politics?" Starleigh put in, somewhat bluntly, as though he was wearying a little of hearing the praises of this paragon of the desert.

"He hasn't got any," Goldsby replied, "and that's why he's the very man we want."

"Oh, come off!" retorted Starleigh. "You're off the track there, if I know anything. We've got to buy a legislature, and you needn't tell me that we can do that through a man who isn't a party leader, on one side or the other. Men will do things in a legislature for the sake of their party that you never in God's world could get 'em to do for any other reason. I've seen it a hundred times, and it's always so. My notion is that you've got to make our scheme a party measure for one side or the other out there, or we're done up before we begin;" and he strode across the floor impatiently, shaking his head as he went.

But Goldsby was not at all put out by this outburst. On the contrary, it seemed to be exactly what he wanted. He let Starleigh walk about for some minutes and grumble to himself for awhile before he should take him in hand and

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show him how wrong he was in the position he had just taken.

Finally he broke out:

"It's damned lucky for us both that we can either of us keep good natured when the other makes an ass of himself. You had your trials when you first opened up your scheme and now I am having mine with you when I'm working it. Now just light a fresh cigar, smooth down your back hair and put a stopper in your temper, and I'll tell you something."

Starleigh turned to him, on this, and an old-time boyish smile spread over his face, as he replied:

"You're a corker, old man! I swear you'd make a mad fighting cock as docile as a setting hen by talking to him two minutes, if you got a fair chance to get in your work."

He lit a cigar, and then Goldsby resumed:

"Now you're right, take things as they regularly go; but it's always dangerous to generalize. As a rule, I'll admit, if you're going to boodle you've got to do it on a party basis. And I'll go further and say it's always the thing to do where you've got a legislature that's solid, one way or the other. If I wanted to boodle an Illinois legislature, the only thing to do would be to work in the interests of the Republican party, or if it was Mississippi,

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just the other way around; but you see the thing is so evenly balanced out there in Nebraska that you can't work to a dead certainty, as you can in these other states. More than that, they've got three parties out there instead of two, and while two's a company, three's a crowd, now and forevermore, amen! And when you come to a crowd, it's different all along the line. See?"

And he turned to note the effect of this first point in his argument.

Starleigh nodded assent and the speaker proceeded:

"So now the thing for us to do is to stay outside of all parties out there, and work some scheme that'll appeal to the whole outfit. And that's just what our business will do,—appeal to 'em all," he went on. "It's ostensibly water for dry land that we're after, and every man in Nebraska is stuck on that, first, last, and all the time. And so, don't you see that it would really be idiotic for us to make a party measure, in a doubtful state, out of what might far better be made a unanimous thing?"

Starleigh said "Sure!" in a reconciled tone of voice.

Goldsby, having won his point, took no time to gloat over his victory, but at once went on from where he left off when the break came:

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“ And that’s why Goodpasture is the very man for us. I said he hasn’t any politics, and it’s true. The fact is that he’s so great a man that he’s above any political party that was ever organized. There’s just one plank in his political platform, and that is ‘the best thing for everybody concerned, every time.’ That’s what he’s after, seven days in the week. And the great thing about it is, that everybody that knows him (and everybody out there does know him) understands his position, and believes in him, through and through. Why, the people in his county believe in him so thoroughly that there wasn’t any opposition candidate to him at all. He had the unanimous support of everybody, and there wasn’t a vote cast against him on election day. He’s a natural leader, and the whole gang can follow him; and that’s just why he’s the man for our money! ”

“ But can we ever get him to take our money? That’s the point,” interposed Starleigh. “ If he is so immaculate and away up in the pictures, what’s the use in our fooling with him? We’ve got to have a man that’s up to snuff.”

“ Hold on! ” Goldsby exclaimed. “ Don’t go so fast, and I’ll tell you all about it. There are things in this world besides money that will make a mare go. The trick is to find out what they are and work ’em right where money won’t go. And

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maybe I haven't lain awake more'n one night, studyin' how to manage my laddie buck Goodpasture without money and without price. But I'm getting there. It's taken everything there was in me to get as far as I have gone, but I'm solid, so far, and don't you ever doubt that I'll stay solid to the end of the game. Now let me tell you how I worked him."

There was a knock on the door and the bell-boy brought in a card which announced the presence of a number of friends below. Whereupon Starleigh said: "All right, show 'em up, boy."

Then, turning to Goldsby he remarked: "To be continued in our next." And they proceeded to make ready for their guests.

CHAPTER V.

THERE are three things that are uppermost in the conversation of certain classes of metropolitan men in this day and age: the first is money; the second, women of a dashing sort; and the third, things to eat and drink.

This is said in no spirit of caviling or cant or criticism, but note is made of it merely as a matter of fact. Go into any city in which modern civilization prevails, and let your ears be open to what comes floating to you on all sides, anywhere and at any time, and the proof of this is forthcoming. No matter where you may be, as certain persons pass by or you happen to be near them, you will hear the word "dollars" several times repeated, while they are within earshot. It is this or "a stunner," or "broiled," or "years old," or words that mean the same thing that will come floating to you.

And this, not because you are playing the eaves-dropper, but because you can not help hearing. These three things are "in the air" of modern cosmopolitan masculine life, and they can no more

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be ignored than the light can go unperceived. There is a touch of this same atmosphere in rural circles also, but it is not so pronounced there. At least the last two subjects are not so much in evidence. Perhaps you will hear the word "dollars" as often in the conversation of country people as in that of their city cousins; but, whatever the rustic may think of "patties, wine, and women," he doesn't say much about them where what he says can be heard.

When the three men who came up with the bell-boy were duly greeted and seated, the first item of conversation for the quintette was business. Then came comments on the latest play and the most "fetching" actresses, after which Starleigh ordered up the drinks.

It was while they were leisurely enjoying these that Parsons, one of the visiting trio, grew reminiscent, and said:

"I had a curious reminder of old times yesterday. I met old Bishop Sloser, down at the Fifth Avenue, and just for has-beens I took him to lunch with me. Did you ever know the Bishop?" he said, turning to Goldsby.

"I remember meeting him once at Delmonico's, but that was a long time ago. It struck me that he was a pretty clever old party for a preacher. Where'd you ever know him?" Goldsby asked.

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"Oh, we worked him to a finish on the Wilbydon Bridge scheme. That was one of the best things I was ever up against," he continued, "and I long, oh, I long for another like it! But it will be long coming," he added, as the laugh went round.

The whole party seemed instinctively to feel that he had more to say, and kept silent accordingly.

At length Parsons continued:

"For a dead easy mark in a business way, commend me to a preacher; and the higher up in the ranks the preacher is, the easier he is to do. I guess they're as smart as most men, take 'em as a whole, but they have less sense than a parcel of kids. I swear, it's beyond belief, their simplicity in that line;" and he slapped his leg at the mere thought of it.

"Why, you wouldn't believe what the Bishop put up to me this morning if I were to tell you," he continued; "but I'm going to lay it out, anyhow, for it's too good to keep.

"I don't know as you fellers ever knew the inside of the Wilbydon Bridge business. Old man Wilbydon was a common blacksmith by trade, but he had a head on him that you had to take off your hat to. I've been to his original shop, a little seven by nine shanty, down in southern Ohio. It

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stood by the side of the road, right near a creek that used to get up and howl whenever there was a big rain.

“ I guess the old man wasn’t hardly of age when he set up there, but before he’d been there a year a big freshet washed out the bridge across the creek just below him, and he took the job of putting in a new bridge in the place of the old one that went out.

“ That was where he got his start. He was an ingenious cuss, and he studied up the weak places of the old bridge and set to work to beat ’em. The result was that he built a bridge that was far and away ahead of anything that had ever been seen or heard of in that neck of the woods, and it wasn’t a year till everybody within a hundred miles that had a bridge to build was after him to build it.

“ Well, you know what that means; and to make a short story of it, inside of five years he was at the head of the Wilbydon Bridge Company and doing a business of a million a year. He made the best bridge there was on the market then, and he made lots of ’em, and he made ’em right, too, every time. The only trick was to make more of ’em, and to find a market for all he could make. That’s the everlasting problem for everybody that

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has a good thing and wants to push it along, to find out where he can unload it! But there's where the old man glistened. He really had a better head for getting rid of goods than he had for making 'em, and that's a rare combination.

"Let me tell you what he did. He took some of us fellers into the deal and put us onto working a scheme for bridge-building in the wild and woolly West, out beyond where anybody lived in those days, for that was about thirty years ago. Of course there wasn't anybody around to use the bridges, but that wasn't our lookout. The thing we were after was to build bridges and get pay for 'em. And here's how we worked it:

"We went out there and worked the legislatures, for that's the place to begin, always, if you want to make millions, or work any big snap." (Goldsby stole a sly wink to Starleigh as this was said.) "We worked the legislatures of five of the newest states this way: We got laws passed in all these states for the organization of new counties in what was then unorganized territory in 'em.

"Now that's clean!" he insisted, or proceeded to explain. "Of course unorganized territory had to become organized, and there had to be laws regulating the change. So we had some laws made

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to suit the situation,—and our own business,” he added with a merry twinkle in his eye.

“These laws provided that wherever there were as many as five hundred people residing on a tract of unorganized territory not more than thirty-six miles square, they could petition the state to be organized into a county. And that’s fair, too. Oh, we set it up right, from stem to stern, or Wilbydon did, for he was the father of the whole business.

“Then, when they had a new county organized, the bill went on to provide for the election of county officers, all right and regular, and defined their duties, and all that sort of thing; and right there was where we got in our work. We got a clause into those bills that provided that the county officers should be Road and Bridge Commissioners for the new counties, with power to lay out roads and improve them, and build bridges wherever *in their judgment* such were needed. Then we made them provide that wherever such bridges were built, if the county couldn’t pay cash for them this County Board of Road Commissioners could issue bonds to raise the money on, and these bonds were declared, by the laws we got made, to be a first lien on all the land in the county. That is, when people finally went out there and took up land on homestead claims, they found it

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already mortgaged by those bridge bonds; and the first thing they had to do was to be taxed to pay the interest on 'em, and the principal, later on. Oh, they were as good as gold, those bonds were!"

As he told this, Parsons doubled himself together with laughter, and his four companions were equally elated at the disclosure. When they had recovered a little, the speaker went on:

"But just wait till you hear the whole story if you want to have a laugh that'll turn you wrong side out, especially the thing that Sloser put up this morning." And at the very thought of what he had in store for his friends, he laughed again till his sides fairly ached.

Then he said:

"They were building miles and miles of new railroads out in that region then, and Wilbydon was long-headed enough to see how he could take advantage of this situation to boom the bridge business by means of it. Fact is, he had it all planned out before he put us to work the legislatures, though he never gave it away to one of us; anyhow, it was all new to me, and I never heard any of the rest of the boys intimate that he ever gave them a pointer.

"And here's what we did: We'd go out to where they were building a railroad and take a

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contract to build, say ten or twenty miles of track. Then we'd put a force of at least five hundred men " (Goldsby got up here and paced the floor, for he saw at a glance all that was to follow, and he was well-nigh overcome with admiration for the man who could plan so gigantically and execute so successfully) " to work on this piece of road. We took time enough for the job to have every employé gain a local residence in the state, if he wasn't already a voter, and as soon as we had the proper number solid, our citizens would petition to be organized into a county."

Starleigh joined Goldsby in walking about, at this stage of the narration, and Parsons continued:

" As soon as we were organized, we'd hold an election, choose our own men for county officers (Wilbydon had these all selected, months ahead. He picked his fellers, and sent 'em out on purpose), and then, of course, the whole game was in our hands, and the rest was dead easy.

" Well, sir, we built bridges everywhere, and our county officers paid any old price we cared to ask for 'em, and issued bonds that were a first lien on all the land in the county to pay for 'em. We'd bring these bonds to New York (they drew ten per cent interest, and ran twenty years), and turn 'em into the banks here at par, or above, and

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maybe we didn't have a good thing! We sold enough bridges in a year to keep our plant running for five years, and because we were afraid the legislature would get together and repeal the laws we were working under, we got our men to issue bonds just as soon as they made a contract for a bridge to be built. Just as soon as the bonds were issued, we'd bring 'em east and cash 'em in, and the minute they were in the hands of innocent purchasers, of course our skirts were clear. We built the bridges finally, of course we did, for we weren't really working a skin game; it was just business, that's all; but I know of counties that had paid two years' interest on their bridge bonds before there was a pound of bridge iron inside the county. But that's all right when you get used to it."

"Damned good story," said Briggs, another of the visitors, "but where does Bishop Sloser come in? You've kept us waiting for the clergy a good while, and now it looks as if he wasn't in it at all," and he turned to the rest for approval, as if he had put Parsons somewhat to shame. But that gentleman quickly replied:

"Oh, don't you fret about Sloser. I'll bring him in all right and show you the best thing yet. You see," he continued, "when a man gets business coming his way he never can get enough. He just goes business-crazy, the way I look at it.

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Anyhow, that's how they've all gone that ever I touched up against."

Starleigh looked at Goldsby again, and their faces were a study for a painter.

Parsons went on:

"You'd think Wilbydon might have been satisfied with as good a thing as he had. But he wasn't. All he'd done so far was only a sort of 'nipper' for what he had planned ahead. I'll bet he could have got out of it then with a couple of millions, but what's a couple of millions to a man thirty-five years old who was shoeing horses in a country blacksmith shop when he came of age? Oh, it's a great country to live in!"

"Did Sloser live in this country?" Briggs asked, prodding Parsons to the point again.

The narrator ignored the question, but continued his story:

"The thing that Wilbydon hadn't done yet was to stock his business on a basis that he thought was worth while. So he tackled that, and here, if it please the court," and he turned towards Briggs, "is where the Bishop comes in.

"Wilbydon worked the whole scheme to a finish, on the last round, and he made the Bishop one of the main spokes in the wheel when he did it.

"In the first place he worked a gag that's pretty

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old now,—moved his plant to a new town on a bonus put up by the enterprising citizens; got options on a lot of old farms near the town, before it got out that he was going to move to the town at all; put his plant in the middle of one of these farms and cut all the rest of 'em up into city lots, and sold these at New York prices to anybody that would buy 'em; and then, when he had everything booming, he issued stock on the whole outfit and put it on the market, dollar for dollar. I never knew how much of the stuff they printed, but one of the boys told me it was away over ten millions. While you're a-printing, it's a good thing to print enough.

“Of course, the thing to do, those days, was to float the stuff abroad. England was chock full of money then, and if it was done right, you could sell anything over there that could be put on white paper.

“Well, Wilbydon knew the Bishop (they'd been boys together), and he knew, too, that the Church people in England were the folks that had the money to blow, if only you could get at 'em right. And he knew the Bishop was the man to get at 'em right; for, as you said, Goldsby, Sloser's a slick duck, and he stood well up in High Church circles in this country and even across the water. So the old man set it up on him to the

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Queen's taste; and I'll give it to you straight, for I happen to know the inside. It's ancient history now, or I wouldn't give it away, even to you fellows, but it's one of the best things I ever got onto, and I've never seen it beaten yet.

"Wilbydon went to Sloser and told him he was making money, hand over fist, and that he wanted to honor the Lord with his substance (Oh, he was a corker, was the old man! There wasn't anything too good for him to use in his practice; and, like Shakespeare's devil, he could cite Scripture for his purpose!), and that what he wanted to do was to found a university for the good of the young and rising generation. I can just hear the old man say it, and see Sloser listen.

"But he told the Bishop he didn't want to be known in the deal personally, that he preferred to follow the Bible and not let his left hand know what his right hand was doing. All he cared for was to put up the stuff and let Sloser get all the power and glory. So he proposed that he'd endow the concern, but that it should be named for the Bishop. The Sloser University was to be an everlasting memorial in honor of his nibs, and all that sort of thing. He had it all in!

"But, of course, he told the preacher, if he got a rake-off on the game he'd have to chip into the play. And then he opened up his scheme. He

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told him they were going to reorganize and restock their concern, and put the stock on the market; and he said he'd give Sloser a dollar in stock in the new concern for every dollar he'd sell for him. And says he:

" ' You go to England, and I'll pay all your expenses, and stand behind you on the whole thing, and you can sell from two to five millions of stock, with the prestige you've got and can get, just as easy as to turn your hand over. If you sell a million, we'll give you a million for your university, and if you sell five millions, we'll put up another five for your school, and there you are.' "

" Did the Bishop bite? " he asked with a chuckle, while the others smiled. " Well, I should remark, " he continued. " He swallowed the whole thing,—bait, bob, sinker, line, and pole. You know what I said about preachers. But wait till I'm through, and then see what you think. "

" The old man had him, but he was one of the lead-pipe-cinch kind, was Wilbydon, and what he once buckled to he never let get away from him; so he went ahead and tied the preacher to him tighter than beeswax. He says to him: "

" ' Now, of course, I wouldn't ask you to put yourself and your ecclesiastical honor and reputation behind this thing if I wasn't willing to let you see and know the inmost workings of our business. "

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For I understand perfectly that a man in your sacred calling can't afford to touch anything that isn't clean to the last penny. So now, here's what I propose to have you do: You come down to our office, and I'll have our bookkeeper show you our books just as far back as you care to see 'em. We'll show you just what we have done, and just what we propose to do. You can see it all, from top to bottom, and then you'll know all about it, and be in a shape to talk business, right from the shoulder.'

"How's that for a stem-winder?" Parsons exclaimed triumphantly.

"But I'm not done yet," he continued, while the others, experienced in like things as they were, listened and wondered. "He got the Bishop down to the office, and did just as he said. He had the bookkeeper not only show him the books, but make transcripts of the profit and loss accounts for the last five years, and he gave these to the Bishop to carry with him. Of course, you can imagine what these showed, the way we'd built bridges and sold 'em and got pay for 'em (lots of 'em not a lick of work done on 'em yet), and the bonus for moving and the real estate deal and all. Oh, it was a sight for,—well, for preachers and their pious flocks!"

The auditors did full justice to the point.

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“Well then, when Sloser had all this in his hands the old man worked the final round on him, or rather, the last but one. He knew that the Bishop stood pat with one of the chief justices on the United States Supreme Bench.”

The company had all risen to their feet now, and they stood in a half circle round Parsons as he spoke:

“He and the Judge had lived neighbors for years and their wives were cousins, and Wilbydon never let anything get away. So he suggested to Sloser that it would be a great help to him abroad if he could show a statement from one of the supreme judges of the United States to the effect that the Wilbydon Bridge Company was solid, and that he, the Judge, knew it was, for he’d examined the books!”

Goldsby could hardly contain himself when this disclosure was made.

“And the Bishop worked it. He actually got a statement, signed by the Judge, just as Wilbydon planned it. Fact is, Wilbydon wrote the statement himself and had it just as he wanted it, at every point.

“When he gave it to the Bishop he said: ‘I’ve made a little memorandum here of some of the things it might be well to get the Judge to certify to. I thought it might assist you a little in pre-

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paring what you'll get him to sign. For it will be best not to ask him to go to all the trouble of writing a statement himself. He's a very busy man, and it wouldn't be fair to ask him to take time to write what he will be perfectly willing to say if all he has to do is to sign his name.' "

Every man of the five actually flushed and looked more than half ashamed as Parsons thus openly put into words the story of a trick they had all used more than once. If only a thing doesn't show, it hardly seems so bad; but when it takes form and appears as it really is, then even the blasé will shudder at the sight. However, the aversion of this company was but for a moment, and then the speaker continued:

"And you ought to have seen the statement that the Judge signed; it was a corker from Corkerville! It made his honor say that from a personal inspection of the affairs of the concern he could recommend its stock as an unusually safe investment for conservative investors, estates, trust funds, etc., etc. Did the Judge sign it?" he said in reply to a question from one of the listeners. "Of course he did! He wouldn't have done so if he had realized what he was doing, but he didn't. He just trusted his friend, the Bishop, and wrote his name where he was told to. The thing is worked every day with the biggest guns

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in the country; and really they are the easiest marks if only you get at 'em right. Why, you remember how Ward did up General Grant, and got him to sign a paper that gave Ward the right to use Grant's name to secure government contracts with. Oh, the scheme will go, anywhere. if you get the right combination.

"By the time Sloser got his credentials from the Supreme Court, Wilbydon had all the rest of the details ready for action. The stock certificates were gotten out regardless, and he had a line of advertising to go with them that would curl your hair. I remember the chief circular started out with poetry,—a verse about 'Opportunity' that was a good one"; and Parsons recited it, as follows:

OPPORTUNITY.

" ' If sleeping, wake; if feasting, rise before
I turn away. It is the hour of fate,
And those who follow me reach every state
Mortals desire, and conquer every foe
Save death; but those who doubt or hesitate,
Condemned to failure, penury and woe,
Seek me in vain and uselessly implore.
I answer not and I return no more.'

"I don't know where he picked the thing up," he continued. "He never went to school six months in his life, all told, but he could write the

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best ad. I ever saw, bar none. Somehow the stuff seemed to come to him, and he'd sit down and sling it together to beat the band. He was just a natural born advertiser and that's the kind you've got to get if you want the best. You can't make 'em if they aren't born right to start on, and I know it."

He paused a moment as if he and his comrades would continue, silently, the philosophy he was expounding. Then he resumed:

"So that's the way he sent the Bishop abroad to do the High Church circles of her Majesty's realm. And he did 'em to a turn, in the next two years. The Bishop told me this morning, that he sold between five and six millions of the stuff. He got up next to the Bishop of London, for a starter, and that put him within speaking distance of the throne. He got the Bishop to invest and to endorse the statement of the Judge, and that set all the big-bugs on a goose-trot to follow his lead. He let 'em all in on the ground floor, as a special favor; and they all came, as they always will if you get 'em headed right and once started.

"Well, here comes the funniest thing in the whole deal, the thing I started out to tell in the first place, and what Bishop Slosher put up to me this morning. You see, Wilbydon made Slosher agree that he wouldn't put any of the stock that

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was given him for his university on the market till after he got back from Europe!"

The company roared again.

"Of course he wouldn't come back as long as he could sell as he was selling, and as the stock he sold paid eight per cent quarterly for the first year, his trade didn't let up. But about the end of the second year the panic came on, and then the trouble began. The legislatures had got in their work, meantime, and repealed the bridge-building laws we got made for 'em, and so the dumping-ground was shut off, and as the factory had caught up on the old orders the whole thing went into the pot. So by the time Sloser got back to New York his stock was worth just about the paper it was printed on. It was a little tough on the old man, but he might have known how it would end, if he'd stopped to think about it, or had had a business head on him. But he was a preacher, and he monkeyed with another man's game, and he got what they all get that travel on that road.

"But now listen: When I met Sloser this morning, he went over the whole story to me, and finally he wound up by saying that the blame for all the trouble lay with the legislatures that repealed the laws the Company was working under!"

If a bomb had exploded in the circle it could

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hardly have produced a greater effect than was caused by this dénouement. The men shot out from a common center and almost ran against the walls on the recoil. They bent themselves together, they held their sides, and roared till they were out of breath. They all agreed that it was the best thing they had ever heard in their lives, and they slapped each other on the back and laughed again and again at the Bishop's conclusion. They were unanimously of the opinion that Parsons had the best story to tell that had ever been going, and they quite envied him in being a party to so good a thing. But he rose still higher in their estimation when he continued, a little later:

"I'll tell you what I told the old man after we got through," he said. "I suggested to him that it would be a good thing to institute proceedings in the United States Supreme Court to declare the repealing acts of these legislatures unconstitutional and void on the ground that they deprived citizens of property without due process of law!"

The yells of laughter that followed this sally almost raised the police, and when the members of the party came to themselves, a few minutes afterwards, they all agreed that it was time to take a walk.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was not till late the next morning that Starleigh and Goldsby renewed their private consultations. Their callers of the previous day were most congenial spirits, and the quintette had made a night of it after they left the hotel. They all slept late the next morning, and it was almost noon before the two principals found themselves ready to proceed to business. When at length they were closeted again, they began where they left off, and Goldsby said:

“That story of Parsons’ was a good illustration of the kind of a man it takes to work the dear people. Goodpasture isn’t a preacher, but he’s been one, and so far as business sense is concerned the ministerial quality stays with him all right. He’s the most unsuspecting man I ever met in my life, and he’s as confidential as a schoolgirl.

“Why, he let me in on the inside of his most private affairs. Let me tell you a story that will show you how close we got together.

“He said that when he first moved out onto the place where he’s living now, their house was three

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miles from the nearest neighbor. They're half a mile now from anybody. Well, he and his wife had been married twelve years, and they'd never had any children; but before they'd been there three months they were perfectly delighted to find that they had prospects of an heir. Tickled to death, he said they were, and bragged on the climate more'n ever.

"He said things ran along all right, and the time slipped by so fast that almost before they knew it the great event they were looking for was right on 'em. Of course they were mighty anxious, for the woman was about thirty-five then, and it was fifteen miles to the nearest doctor. Besides that, it was an awfully dry year, and the ponds Goodpasture had for his stock all dried up, so that he was forced to dig a well or be away from home a good deal to drive his cattle five miles to the river.

"They have to go down from two hundred to two hundred and fifty feet for a well out there, and most of the way through solid limestone rock. Well, the event coming on, and the well having to be dug, made it a kind of hustling time of year for Goodpasture; but as luck would have it, he was able to get a man and his wife, who had a ranch about five miles from him, to come and help

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'em out. The neighbor woman would stay with his wife during the day, and the man would help him dig the well. These folks drove over every morning and went back home at night.

"He said they had the well down about one hundred and seventy-five feet, and this neighbor was down in the bottom of it with a lot of dynamite and a drill, getting ready to put in a blast. They had a kind of a windlass that was worked by horse power for hauling the rock out of the well after it was blasted loose, and Goodpasture was up on top, waiting to pull the man up when he got the blast ready, had the horse all hitched to the windlass, and everything shipshape.

"Just then out rushes the neighbor's wife and tells Goodpasture that the hour of delivery is at hand, and for him to hustle for the doctor, double-quick!

"Well, sir, Goodpasture said he was so excited that he forgot all about the man in the well, and just stripped the harness off the horse and mounted it and rode off for the doctor, fifteen miles, as hard as ever he could go. He got back about three hours later, the doctor with him, to find that everything was over, that he was the father of a ten-pound boy, and mother and child doing as well as could be expected. Said he was the tickledest man



'I don't find it in this ; I'll have to have your unabridged.'
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in ten states, and he went around for about an hour as if he was walking on clouds.

"Finally the neighbor woman came to him and said:

" ' But where's John ? ' says she ; ' I've been expecting him in every minute for the last three hours, and he hasn't showed up. What was he doing when you went for the doctor ? ' "

" And then, Goodpasture said, it came over him like a flash that he'd gone off and left the fellow in the bottom of the well, with nothing but a drill and a stick of dynamite to amuse himself with for four hours ! Said he was afraid to pull the man up for fear he'd kill him as soon as he got on top of sod again, but that he'd be indicted for murder if he left him where he was, where he couldn't do any harm. But anyhow, he took his chances and hoisted the man out, and the fellow forgave him under the circumstances."

" Well, you have had experiences ! " Starleigh remarked. " You ought to write a book and call it ' What I Saw Among the Natives. ' It would be ' mighty interestin ' reading, ' as old Greeley used to say."

" Never mind the experiences," Goldsby replied. " I only told you the story to show you how thoroughly Goodpasture gave me his confidence. Oh,

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he's a darling, and he's the man we want, and he's ours, first, last and all the time!"

Starleigh said he had no doubt on this point now; that he felt sure Goodpasture was all they could desire, and intimated that he was ready to hear the next section of details. Whereupon Goldsby continued:

"I'll have to go back a little and tell you about my first meeting with Goodpasture," he said. "I'd heard about him, and how popular he was with everybody, and how he had got the folks from all the country round and had 'em build a sod church that he preached in for nothing, almost every Sunday, and all that sort of thing. After I got acquainted with him, I went to hear him preach half a dozen times, and I tell you he's a good one in the pulpit. No spread-eagle oratory or old-fashioned theology, but just straight religion, right from the shoulder. If we had more such preaching this world would be a good deal fitter to live in.

"So the first time I saw him, I managed to get to his house along about sundown, so as to get a chance to stay all night with him. I drove up to the house and I saw him coming in from the barn just as I got ready to hitch. He was bringing in a couple of buckets of milk, and as soon as he'd

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left 'em in the kitchen he came out to where I was with the team.

“ Soon as he got outside I got off a cough that'd break your heart. I coughed so hard and so much that it was about all I could do to tell him who I was and what I wanted, but I got it out at last; and, really, before I told it all to him I saw that he was the man I was looking for.

“ And the first thing that put me on, for a dead sure thing, was the fact that he had a cough that was worse than mine, if possible, only his was the genuine article. The poor devil, he'd cough and cough. I'd say a few words, and then I'd have to cough, and before I'd get to talking again, he'd have to cough, so we had it, off and on, for about fifteen minutes. Finally, though, I got it to him, what I wanted, and he told me it would be all right, though they didn't make a business of keeping strangers. But he said he couldn't think of sending a man off, at that time in the evening, with as bad a cough as I had, for he knew how it was himself.

“ Say, didn't I fetch him the first round? I tell you what, old man,” he added, “ when this thing pans out, we ought to let that Harvard man that gave me the idea of that cough, we ought to give him a block of a million or two of stock for putting me onto the thing. Of course he never

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planned to do it, but we ought to reward him out of sheer gratitude to good luck."

Starleigh said that they would "take care of him when the time came," and Goldsby proceeded:

"Well sir, we took to each other like brothers, and we're still at it. I stayed with him for a couple of weeks, off and on, a good share of the time studying out how I could get a hook on him that would make him our meat. And I tell you it worked me worse than anything I ever tackled in my life. You see, he's as square as a brick and as clean as cloth, and you couldn't come within a million miles of him with money.

"I thought about making a donation to his church. That'll fetch most preachers and make 'em yours, body and boots; but by inquiry round I found that the church didn't need any money, for a wonder. They built their church out of sod, all the folks for ten miles round working at it, and so it didn't cost 'em anything, only a trifle for doors and windows, and a little for roofing, and Goodpasture preaches just for the love of it, or because he has something to say, and won't take any salary, so there was no show for me that way. But he's ours all the same," he continued, "and all for less than a twenty-dollar bill, and I'll tell you how I worked it.

"Among other things that he told me, he gave

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it away to me that he once had a fine library but lost it in a fire that struck him when he was teaching school. He said he'd bought a normal school building that had been built on a boom (Nebraska is full of 'em, fine big plants that cost thousands of dollars, and now aren't worth as many cents), and that he had a fine start for working up a school that would pay, when the building took fire and burned to the ground till there wasn't so much as a shingle left. Said there was some trouble about title among the parties he bought it from, and he had no doubt it was set afire. It burned in the night, when he was away, so he lost everything he had, his library with the rest.

"As soon as he told me that, I saw an opening, and I lay for it. It may seem a pretty small piece of business to you, but I count it one of the smoothest schemes I ever worked, taking all the circumstances into account. Here's what I did:

"One evening, when we were talking, I said to him:

" 'I wish you'd let me see your dictionary a few minutes. I've had a word running through my head all day that I can't spell, and I'd like to look it up.'

"You see, I'd looked through what few books he had in the house, and I discovered that he had no unabridged dictionary, and I knew that a man

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of his make-up would be about like a ship without a compass, under such circumstances, and that right there was a chance for me to get in my work.

“ ‘Tell me what the word is, and maybe I can help you out,’ says he.

“ I hadn’t counted on his coming back at me in that way, and it knocked me for a second; but I got my wind in a minute, and was ready for him.

“ ‘Oh, I’d be ashamed to tell you,’ I said, ‘for it’s really a very simply word, and you’d think any fool ought to be able to spell it.’

“ That fetched him, and brought him to the show-down I was counting on, and says he:

“ ‘All right. I’ll give you the best I’ve got,’ and he went and brought me a little seven-by-nine academic dictionary, which was all he had, and I knew it.

“ I took the thing and pawed around in it for awhile and then says I:

“ ‘I don’t find it in this; I’ll have to have your unabridged.’ And there I had him!

“ ‘I’m sorry to say,’ says he, ‘that that’s the best I can do for you. My unabridged dictionaries were all burned in the normal school fire. I had three, *The Century*, *International* and *Worcester*, and they all went up in smoke.’ And he

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heaved a sigh that threw him into a coughing fit when he said it.

"And right there I got in my work, and the game turned just as I saw it had to.

"I stopped and looked at him a minute, and coughed a good long sympathetic cough, and then says I:

" 'Well now, isn't this curious? I assure you I appreciate the situation, and I'm more than delighted to think that I can help you out of your misfortune, if you will let me. I have a friend who made me a present last Christmas of a fine *Webster's Unabridged*, latest edition, morocco bound. It's a beautiful book, and I fully appreciate my friend's generosity; but the fact is, I don't need the book at all. I have three others in my library, and I don't need it in the least. Of course I wouldn't sell it, for it is the gift of a friend; but I could give it away with a relish, especially if it could fall into the hands of one who would appreciate it as you would.' "

"I swear, Starleigh, the cold sweat stood out all over me when I got through that speech! It was make or break, right there, and I was damned afraid it was going to be break, the way he looked at me while I was talking. He looked me in the eye with a kind of a 'What the hell are you driving at?' expression that sent the shivers all over

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me, and made me afraid he was going to call my bluff right then and there. But I put on a bold front, and looked as innocent as an infant Saint John, and that laid him out, though it took all there was in me to make it. We stood looking at each other for near a minute, I guess, though it seemed a young eternity to me, and I never changed a muscle. Finally he weakened, and says he:

“ ‘It is very kind of you, Mr. Goldsby, to make such an offer. Under ordinary circumstances though I should hesitate to accept it, for I am exceedingly sensitive about placing myself under obligations to any one, under any circumstances; but somehow you and I have got along so well together that I feel that I can receive a courtesy from you without an unpleasant feeling of obligation, and so——’ But I cut him off:

“ ‘Obligation nothing,’ says I. ‘The idea of your talking about obligations, when I’ve been living off you for a couple of weeks, and have put you and your wife to all manner of trouble, and all for nothing;—don’t talk to me about obligations!’ And I closed the breach so tight that an earthquake wouldn’t open it.

“And that’s how I got to him. Inside a week I ran into Omaha and bought the best bound *Webster* I could find in the city, paid a fellow a

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dollar to write in it what my supposed friend would write when he gave it to me, wrote below it, in my own handwriting, a dedication to 'My dear friend Goodpasture,' and sent the thing to him by express, charges prepaid."

Goldsby fairly beamed with admiration of himself as he concluded the story and Starleigh was equally impressed with the cleverness of his friend. He was more thankful than ever that he had so able an assistant in the work he had planned, and together they were as self-satisfied a pair as one would meet in a hundred-day march. They were both sure that the game was all theirs so far, and what more could be asked, or even wished?

"He wrote me a beautiful letter of thanks, a few days later," Goldsby went on to remark, "in which he said he hoped our acquaintance might continue, and that our relations to each other might ever be as cordial and pleasant as they had been thus far. They'll continue all right," he added, "and if they aren't cordial and pleasant it won't be my fault!" And he took a turn around the room as if to wind up that section of the business in due form, and beyond necessity of its ever being opened again.

CHAPTER VII.

“**A**ND now what’s the next turn of the wheel?” Starleigh asked, as if somewhat impatient to get to work at something tangible.

“The very thing I’m coming to,” Goldsby replied. “We’ve got it all cleaned up as far as we’ve gone, and now we’ve got to ‘run a new lead,’ as they say in a mining camp. And the next thing on the programme is to get our stocks and bonds for the bombarding plant into shape, and all ready to go onto the market. And there’s where you’ll have to get in your fine work. Maybe you’ll have to acquire a cough too before you get through with it,” he added, by way of getting partially even with Starleigh for the guying which that gentleman had indulged in.

“Oh, I’ll cough up the stock and bonds all right, when the time comes,” Starleigh rejoined, “but of course we can’t put ’em on the market till you get your bill and charter through the legislature. When do you count that you’ll have them safely landed?”

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"Well, of course, I can't say exactly. Such things don't move on schedule time," Goldsby replied. "The legislature meets the first of the year, and I believe we can get the bill through by the first of April. And the very minute it's through, you want to have your paper all ready to shove. Who're you going to get to underwrite the stuff?" he asked, as if the idea had just occurred to him.

"Shall we have to have it underwritten?" Starleigh asked, in a somewhat doubtful and wavering tone.

"Sure!" replied Goldsby. "Time's gone by when you can float as much stuff as we've got to have just on its face. We've got to get the best there is on the Street to back us up, or we won't be in it for ten cents."

Starleigh got up and paced the floor heavily, his hands clasped behind him and his brow severely knitted. The situation was one he had never dreamed of as being at all necessary, or even possible; and to have it thus flung suddenly upon him swept him off his feet. Goldsby walked too, and they crossed and re-crossed each other, time and again, neither saying a word. Starleigh was silent because he didn't know what to say, and Goldsby held his pace for the reason that he was quite willing to "let Starleigh sweat awhile," as

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he mentally said to himself. He didn't wish to make his partner suffer too long, but the savage instinct for torture is not lightly seated in many a civilized breast. Besides this, he had thought the whole situation through himself, had studied up all its details, and he was really only waiting to unfold his project to the nervous man whom he now had on the rack.

But when one has really accomplished a purpose that is, after all, unworthy, the attainment brings small relish, and the pleasure that results is fleeting. The Sodom apple turns to ashes at the first touch, and the keeping qualities of a fruit all develop after it has become an object of disgust.

So Goldsby's pleasure in Starleigh's discomfiture was but for a moment, and he really hurried to his relief an instant later.

"Well, how's this?" he ejaculated, as if a plan had just occurred to him that he had spent weeks in working out.

Starleigh straightened up as if he were recovering from a horrid nightmare, and said:

"For God's sake let's have it, if you've got anything to suggest." And then, for fear that there could be nothing to suggest, his countenance fell again, and he resumed his march up and down the floor.

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It is a curious mental make-up which men of this sort possess. To say that they have a 'mercurial temperament' is to state the case all too mildly. For quicksilver moves up and down the tube slowly and for due cause only, while the spirits of men like Starleigh will bob up and down with lightning rapidity, and at a mere suggestion or fancy they will soar into the clouds or sink to bottomless depths. More than this, in whatever state they are at a given time, it is quite impossible for them to remove themselves therefrom by their own volition. It is only when some outside agency acts upon them that they can change their mood. So Starleigh agonized till Goldsby came to his relief.

"Why, here's the thing to do," Goldsby said. "We must make that word 'experimental' of yours earn its board and clothes and do something for us in return for all the honor and dignity we are conferring on it."

Starleigh was at the top of the tube in an instant. He had as yet no clear idea of what Goldsby would propose, but the word "experimental" came to him as a familiar tool comes to the hand of the workman who has used it for years, and he felt that he was once more at home among his household gods. He turned triumphantly to his partner and exclaimed:

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"Why, yes! That's it! I told you from the start that word would be the making of us. And of course it will. But how will you work it?" he added, as he felt himself slipping down the decline again at the thought of details.

Goldsby didn't let him slip far before he sent him up again, by saying:

"We'll name our first concern the Experimental Sky Bombarding Company. That's really in accordance with your first suggestion, only you didn't go quite far enough in your plans as to just what we'd do with the company when we got it materialized."

"Of course we'll name it that," Starleigh interrupted. "But there's nothing new about that, and how will it help out this underwriting business?" There was a disappointed quaver in his voice that was pathetic.

"Don't be too much in haste," Goldsby returned. "Hear me out, and then see. You must make a distinction, my dear man. The greatest affairs in all the world turn on the merest trifles. The two most numerous branches of the Christian Church to-day got their start on the spelling of a word. One side wanted to spell it one way and the other side another way. There was only the difference of a single letter between 'em, but it split 'em as wide apart as though it had been the Pacific

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Ocean. And so, in this business of ours, its success or failure all turns on the way we get onto little things, and make 'em come our way.

"Now see here," he went on. "There's all the difference in the world between getting a charter that will give us the right to bombard the sky experimentally in Nebraska, and one that will confer on us the power to organize a stock company and sell stock for working the plant with. See?" And he turned to Starleigh triumphantly. The latter nodded his comprehension of the point and Goldsby proceeded:

"Of course, we'll have to get our franchise to shoot from the state the shooting is to be done in; but our right to print and float a few millions of stock on the strength of that franchise,—we'll go to New Jersey for that. For, thank heaven, there's one state in the Union yet where almost anything in this world can be incorporated, on almost any basis that anybody pleases. We can get what we want there, and all we want of it, and no questions asked."

"But you'll have to get your Nebraska franchise before you can do anything in New Jersey, won't you? You've got to have something to go on before they'll give you a charter, even there." And again Starleigh became fearful.

"No, we won't have to get the Nebraska busi-

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ness settled at all before we open up in New Jersey. We've got enough to operate on in that state, right now."

"For God's sake, what have we got that can be counted as a tangible asset at this stage of the game?" Starleigh inquired.

"Prospects!" shouted Goldsby, as if that settled it. "We've got prospects, plenty of 'em, and the best in the world. And any sort of a prospect is sufficient basis for a charter for any number of millions in New Jersey, any day in the week."

"But you can't get stock underwritten that has nothing but a prospect behind it," Starleigh protested.

"Granted, under ordinary circumstances," Goldsby replied. "But it's the extraordinary that we'll have up our sleeve, in our case. You can get your stuff underwritten before it has really panned out a dollar, if you can only show up prospects that are extraordinary enough to bear the load; and that's just what we've got. See here!"

He went to his traveling bag, took out a bundle of papers and proceeded to unfold them, as he went on:

"Now you take it in mining for instance. Suppose you could show to the satisfaction of the underwriter that you controlled a vein of quartz

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that was rich in gold. Suppose, too, that you could establish the fact, beyond question (for this is not fooling now, but business on the ground floor), that there was a positively known quantity, or number of tons, of this quartz, and that it would absolutely run so many ounces of pure gold to the ton."

"Never could find such a thing in God's world," said Starleigh.

"I didn't say you could," Goldsby returned. "I merely said suppose you could. That's all I'm asking now. Don't show down till you're called." Then he continued:

"Suppose you could find such a thing, and could establish the fact that you were dead sure of, say, a third interest in it, do you suppose you could get anybody to stand behind you on that?"

Starleigh couldn't see just where Goldsby was going to fetch up, but he had faith enough in him to acquiesce, as the latter proceeded to spread out his papers, and said:

"Now here's our vein."

Starleigh hurriedly put on his glasses and bent over the documents.

"And it's no little thin slice of white rock sandwiched in between two mountains of granite, that may go ten miles, or may pinch out ten feet ahead," Goldsby declared. "On the contrary, it

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is in plain sight from end to end, and has been for years. It has been proved, time and again, just what its output is, and there is no more doubt about it than there is about the rising and setting of the sun."

He seemed in no haste to be more explicit, but dallied with his indefiniteness, as though it were a delight to him to make the suspense as long as possible.

"Oh, come down!" said Starleigh, almost beside himself with curiosity.

"Well, here you are," replied Goldsby;—Nebraska produces annually, 210,000,000 bushels of corn, 25,000,000 bushels of wheat, 15,000,000 bushels of rye, 58,000,000 bushels of oats, 10,000,000 bushels of barley and more than 50,000,000 bushels of other stuff, not including fruits and vegetables. The cash value of the grain product of the state last year was \$92,000,000, and if you add in the fruits and vegetables, it was more than \$125,000,000; and the average for the last ten years has been over \$100,000,000, taking the whole crop products of the state.

"Now," he went on triumphantly, "there's a basis to figure on,—positive, definite, an absolutely known quantity."

Starleigh held his peace, and gazed inquiringly, while Goldsby proceeded:

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"The fact is, I've been doing a little work on my own hook, on this basis." He picked up the first sheet of paper from the roll before him. "And here's what I've done: I got up these forms, and went out and tried 'em on, to see how they'd go. Just wait till I show you."

He spread the paper out and proceeded to read as follows:

This Agreement, entered into this day between The Moisture Supply Company of the first part, and John Doe of the second part, witnesseth:

That if the said party of the first part shall so increase the amount of moisture upon the N. E. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 12, Town 3 North, Range 2 East, as to increase the crop product of the said land beyond the average of what it has been for the past ten years, then and in that case it is hereby agreed by the party of the second part that the party of the first part shall be entitled to one-half of the crop increase thus gained from the aforesaid increase of moisture . . . etc., etc.

This agreement is to have full force and to remain binding upon the said N. E. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 12, Tp. 3 N., R. 2 E., so long as the said party of the first part shall continue a supply of moisture which shall raise the average increase of crops as above noted.

Witness our hands and seals . . . etc., etc.

Starleigh was ready to spring to his feet, but Goldsby laid his hand on his arm and held him down.

"Wait a minute till I finish my play," he said, and then he continued:

"I'm the greatest man that ever lived for experimenting with things as they really are. I can guess if I have to, but when it comes to really

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doing things, I have to stand on solid ground and know what's under my feet.

"Now this is no guesswork, what we can get the farmers of Nebraska to do. I have proved it to a finish. I've got, right here in my hand, more than six hundred such agreements as I've read to you, every one signed, sealed, and delivered, so that they'd stand in any court of law in the United States. And this six hundred is a mere drop in the bucket to what can be had for the asking.

"I went out and got these myself," he went on to explain, "because I wanted to demonstrate that the thing could be done. If I had trusted it to anybody else, I shouldn't have been sure of it; but I've done it all myself, and now I know just what is possible. I personally canvassed six townships, in six different counties in the state, and I never missed a man that I set out to get to sign that contract. And what I have done in these six townships can be done in every township in the state. There isn't a farmer in Nebraska that won't sign such a document, if he only gets a chance to do so. The whole thing is in their interest, the way I've got it up to 'em, and they'll agree to it, and fall over each other to get a chance to do so."

He leaned far back in his chair as he said this, holding the roll of contracts high over his head in

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his left hand, and before Starleigh could say a word he continued:

“Now just see what such a stack of contracts as that would amount to for the whole state of Nebraska. It is perfectly safe to say that if that whole state could have a sufficient supply of moisture to develop a full crop, every season, it would produce four times as much as it does now. Call it three times, to be within bounds (for I want to be conservative), and see what we’ve got. We shall have a perpetual third interest in the entire agricultural output of that state, which will then be three times what it is now: That is, we shall have an annual income which will be equal to the entire crop product of Nebraska, as it now is, or more than \$100,000,000 a year for our share! Now \$100,000,000 a year income, if you allow half of it for expenses, and it won’t take that, will pay five per cent net on \$1,000,000,000 of stock! Is that anything to go on? Can we get anybody to underwrite now, do you think?” And he gave his partner such a slap on the shoulder as would have made him wince had he not been too much excited to feel the blow.

Starleigh sprang to his feet and burst into an impassioned eulogy of the man before him, and of his fitness for the work in hand.

"Give me your hand, old boy!" he almost yelled. "You're a brick! You're a peach! You're a dandy from Dandyville! Say, but you have got a head on you for the details of business! I can do some things, in my own line. I can plan how to turn the world end for end; but when it comes to actually working out the details of business, on a Saint-Peter-sandstone, rock-bottom basis, you take the cake and I take a back seat! Wow! But that's a good one!" And he fairly hugged Goldsby in his ecstasy.

Goldsby took his honors with moderation, for he foresaw that there was at least one more point to be carried before Starleigh would be beyond the falling point, where he could safely be trusted to work up the matter of underwriting the stock of the company. He let Starleigh cool down and think for awhile, for he felt sure that a flaw in his argument would appear to that gentleman when once more he was clothed and in his right mind. And, indeed, it was not many minutes till he saw that doubt was supplanting belief, and that the man of large plans but small powers of performance was getting ready to weaken again. The face that had been in a blaze of triumphant assurance became clouded with anxiety, and slowly lengthened into a look of dread which showed that despair was not far off. Goldsby watched him,

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but said never a word. Finally Starleigh broke out:

"But we can't canvass the whole state of Nebraska before we get our stock on the market!"

It was the very point Goldsby had been waiting for him to make, and he met it instantly:

"We don't have to," he said in a tone that brought sweet relief to Starleigh. "The only party we have to convince is our underwriter, and I've got enough to do that with, right here in my hand. Those men don't know a thing about farming, anyhow, and with six hundred farmers' signatures that you can actually show; signatures to agreements that give you the right to take one-third of their crop perpetually,—why, what more will they ask?"

"But we aren't sure of the moisture," said Starleigh. "Suppose the broker comes at me on that point."

It was the last charge, and Goldsby had it out of the way in an instant, as he replied:

"Why, man, that's just where your 'experimentally' business comes in. The underwriter won't give a rush as to whether we can get a drop of moisture or not. All he cares for is to make sure that the block of stuff he stands behind will sell, and that he can get his rake-off for his services as sponsor to the extent of what he puts up.

Our showing will convince him that the stock will float, beyond doubt, and the business is done, so far as he is concerned. Why, we can prove to him that our scheme is so plausible that there won't any one who is asked to sign these contracts take the trouble even to ask questions about them. I took these contracts and went out and got 'em signed when 'the party of the first part' existed only in my own brain, and not a single signer said a word. Some of 'em asked me how we proposed to increase the amount of moisture, and I simply told 'em that they needn't worry about that; that we'd see to that all right. All we asked was our share in the profit, if we did the work. I told 'em that, and it went. And if a thing like that will go, with not a leg to stand on, we can find an underwriter who will see, quick enough, that we can sell stock on such a scheme, with him behind it."

This special plea of Goldsby's had its desired effect on Starleigh's mind, and he was fully convinced that he could secure as underwriter the first banker he should ask to undertake it. This point established, they adjourned for lunch.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was but a few days after the interview just noted that everything was in readiness for the next vital move in this great enterprise. Such a trifle as procuring a charter from the state of New Jersey had been easily attended to, and the equally insignificant matter of preparing and printing several millions of stock in the concern had been compassed. All the preliminaries were arranged, and, as Goldsby put it, it was "up to them" now to get the underwriting attended to. It was to this undertaking that Starleigh addressed himself; and, as already intimated, he had small doubt of his entire success in the premises.

It may not be amiss, just here, to explain to the uninitiated something of the nature of "underwriting," as the term is used in this connection. It is a matter of almost daily occurrence to read in the financial news of the day the statement that such and such a lot of securities, or stock, has been put upon the market, and that So-and-so has "underwritten the whole block." The name of the firm mentioned is frequently one that is well known, and there are multitudes of people who

understand, from such announcement, that these popular financiers have "guaranteed" the securities that they have underwritten. What is really done is this:

When a financial concern, banker or broker, underwrites a lot of stock, or securities of any kind, it simply agrees that it will advance a certain amount of money on the paper, and if all the lot is not sold by a given time, it will keep whatever is left, at the agreed price. The underwriters assume no liability for the stock or securities that they sell in this way. All that they do is to risk a certain amount of money, and agree to do what they can to dispose of a certain quantity of financial paper, by a certain time, not below a certain price; and if they fail, they agree to take all that remains unsold at an agreed price. This is underwriting, and for this service the underwriting concerns are paid commissions varying according to the risk they run in handling any given lot of securities, the chances they take of being able to dispose of all they take hold of, or of having it left on their hands.

Starleigh and Goldsby had conferred long and anxiously as to just what financial concern they should entrust their business to. They finally settled on the firm of Ketchum and Markham. These brokers had the reputation of never failing

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to dispose of anything and everything they took hold of; and though they were reckoned exceedingly shrewd, not to say hard-bargaining men, still, on due consideration it was agreed that they were the very parties for the job of "financiering" the Experimental Sky Bombarding Company, of New Jersey.

So to Ketchum and Markham Starleigh came duly. He was specially anxious to have both members of the firm present at his first interview, for the outcome was crucial, and so much depends on the initiative. But the Fates were against him, and only Ketchum was in the office the morning he called. He hesitated for a moment, and at one time was on the point of excusing himself and saying that he would call again; but Ketchum was so exceedingly gracious, and his manner was so assuring that almost before he knew what he was doing he had got so far into his business that it was impossible for him to retreat in good order. The outcome was that he pulled himself together and proceeded to tell what he wanted, without more ado.

And it was wonderful, even to Starleigh himself, how quickly he found himself feeling entirely at home with this broker. After they had talked a few minutes, Ketchum asked him to come around

to his side of the desk and sit beside him as they discussed the plans of the Company.

Starleigh had fortified himself with the New Jersey charter, a few sample shares of stock, and some of the contracts that Goldsby had secured in the name of the Moisture Supply Company. He made a fine showing of affairs during the two hours he talked on the subject, and Ketchum listened intently to every word he said.

When he finally came to the conclusion of his initial address, Ketchum sat for some minutes without saying a word. He had a way of holding the first finger of his left hand pressed close against the side of his nose when he was listening and thinking, had Ketchum, and the more intently he listened and thought, the harder he forced finger and nose together. Starleigh glanced at him, as he rounded up his final sentence, and noticed that nose and finger were almost one flesh, while the eyes were far off and dreamy. He wondered if the financier were thinking of something else, or if he had really made so profound an impression upon him. They sat thus in silence for awhile; then Ketchum rallied, and broke out:

"Great scheme, Mr. Starleigh. Great scheme! Does you great credit as a man of financial ability on modern lines," he said. "I don't know when I've seen so ingenious a plan for great financial

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gains on so small an outlay." Then he put his finger against his nose again, and pressed it hard. At length he resumed:

"Who did you say got those contracts?" he asked, picking up one of the Moisture Supply Company's agreements.

"Mr. Goldsby, my partner in this business, made a personal canvass for them," Starleigh replied. "He is a very able man along those lines, and one that can be depended on, every time. He wanted to prove, beyond question, that such contracts could be made with the entire farming constituency of Nebraska, and he tells me that out of six hundred farmers that he asked to sign the documents, not a single one refused or even hesitated to amount to anything."

Ketchum looked afar off, pressed finger and nose together severely again, reflected for some minutes, and then said:

"Have you ever tried this bombarding business yourself?"

There was a suggestion of a twinkle in one eye as he said this, or, at least, there was something about the man that gave Starleigh a twinge. But he put all this aside, as he replied:

"Why, no, not personally, but there really isn't any question on that score. I have never tried bombarding the sky myself, but I know what the

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result will be just as well as though I had gone through the performance."

It was a bold bluff, but the occasion demanded it, and Starleigh was not a little proud that he was equal to the emergency. Before he could expend much admiration upon himself, however, Ketchum shot out:

"But what do you *know* about it?"

It was almost a challenge for blood this time, and Starleigh felt that the crisis was on. He caught his breath cautiously, but without a moment's hesitation proceeded to clear everything before him. There was a touch of injured innocence in his tone, as he said:

"Why, here's what I know about it, though I hadn't intended to go into the details of the operation of the plant, in financing the stock." And then, for fear that he had been a little impetuous, and realizing that it would be bad policy to offend, he hastened to add:

"But of course it's only right that you should know the bottom facts in the business if you undertake to float our stock. It's really all as plain as daylight to me, but I suppose that's largely because I've lived with the thing so long. I know it so well that it seems to me everybody else ought to know it just as well as I do. But of course they don't,

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and your question is perfectly justifiable, under the circumstances."

Then he went on:

"Did you ever notice how, in a thunder storm, a great big dash of rain will always follow a great big clap of thunder?"

Ketchum held his nose hard, and turned his eyes full on Starleigh, who continued:

"That is probably the most suggestive, not to say convincing fact in the whole list, for it is one that never varies. I've seen it a thousand times myself, and everybody who has observed the phenomenon will testify to its invariability. It is always the same, and it establishes the relation that subsists between detonation and precipitation beyond all question."

He paused just a moment, to see if Ketchum would say a word,, but that gentleman only held his nose and looked afar off, whereupon Starleigh proceeded:

"Then there is all the testimony of battle-fields. It always rains after a big battle, when there has been heavy cannonading."

"Maybe it's the powder-smoke that causes it," Ketchum put in.

Starleigh charged at this opening:

"Don't make any difference if it is!" he retort-

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ed, a good deal nettled. "Our plan provides for smoke as well as noise!"

Ketchum saw that he had put his foot in it, but he never changed his position a single degree. He only said "Of course!" and sat as he was. But Starleigh was not slow to observe his advantage, and he hastened to make the most of it.

"Then there are all the well known facts obtained from southern France, where for more than a century they have protected their vineyards by changing cyclones and hailstorms into gentle showers by bombarding the sky."

Ketchum stared at Starleigh, who blinked not, but went on to a finish.

"Why, it is perfectly marvelous the amount of testimony there is on this subject when one masses it, as Goldsby and I have been doing for the past year or two. The facts are no longer questioned by intelligent and scientific men everywhere, and capitalists are getting ready to fall over each other in availing themselves of the opportunity of utilizing the situation. That's the chief reason why we are in a hurry about getting into the market."

He judged from Ketchum's looks that he had him on the run now, and he pursued him hotly as he drew from his pocket a newspaper clipping and said:

"For instance, here's a little thing that I

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clipped from a paper only last week." And he read:

RICHMOND, Ind., Dec. 11.—Prof. John E. Baldwin, the aeronaut, is preparing to make an interesting experiment next summer, the first time there is a drouth in this section. His plan is to send up 1,000 balloons from different points, each to carry a dynamite bomb, the same to be exploded as nearly simultaneously as possible, the object being to produce rain.

The balloons will be sent up from Richmond, Centerville, Cambridge City, New Castle, Middletown, Muncie, Parker City, Winchester, Hagerstown and Lostantville. Several men are backing Mr. Baldwin in making the experiment.

Ketchum listened as Starleigh read. When he had finished he put out his hand for the slip and re-read it carefully a couple of times. Then he said:

"Did they try the thing?"

"Haven't had time," Starleigh responded. "Don't you see, that's taken from a last week's paper, and they are laying plans for next year. But it isn't whether they've tried it or not that interests me. It is the fact that capitalists are ready to back the experiment. That's the point that I take stock in."

He felt that he had the iron in Ketchum's soul now, and that he could twist it around if necessity required. But the broker took a new tack, which called for defense from another quarter.

"I understand that you haven't got your charter from Nebraska yet," Ketchum said.

"Why, no," Starleigh admitted. "We haven't

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got it in our hands, signed, sealed, and delivered; but we've got it where it's just as sure to come to us as the sun is to rise."

And then, as if to head off the man whom he began to fear he was sparring with, and who, he suspected, was thinking about the possibilities of getting in ahead of him, and procuring a charter for himself and his, he hastened to make assurance sure:

"We've got the legislature of Nebraska all pledged to us in advance," he declared. "Goldsby is an old hand at that business, and he has been working at it out there for three months, and there isn't a thing left that we don't own. As you say, we haven't got the charter through; but all we lack is a mere form. The bill is all prepared, and as soon as the legislature meets, will be passed, practically unanimously, by both houses. That's not for everybody to know," he added, as though he would not strike a man needlessly when he was down, "but I don't hesitate to let you in on it, things being as they are."

Ketchum thought for a long time, Starleigh sitting silent beside him. Finally he took his finger off his nose, drew a long breath and said:

"Can you come in again to-morrow, at, say, about ten o'clock?"

Starleigh was about to enter his protest against

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an adjourned meeting, for experience had taught him that now is the accepted time; but before he could say the word, Ketchum continued:

"Your plans seem very feasible, and you have them all well guarded, exceptionally well guarded, at every point; but if we take hold of the work for you, I must ask you to go over all the details with my partner, Mr. Markham. He is a very careful and conservative man, and I have great faith in his judgment. Indeed, I make it a point never to undertake any great project without his fullest approval. I might say," he hastened to add, as he saw a shade of disapproval creeping over Starleigh's face, "that from what you have told me this morning I think there is little doubt that Mr. Markham will think favorably of your enterprise, but we could not underwrite so large a block of stock as you propose without going over everything together. So come in at ten tomorrow. I'll have Markham here, and the probabilities are that we can close the deal to the satisfaction of all parties concerned."

He said this with so much assurance that Starleigh was convinced he meant every word of it, and without further protest he gathered up his papers and bade Mr. Ketchum good morning.

CHAPTER IX.

THE following night was a long and anxious one for Starleigh. Goldsby was out of town, and he had no one to confer with while he waited for the coming of ten o'clock the next day. He slept little, thought much, and imagined more. Sometimes it seemed to him a positive certainty that Ketchum and Markham would stand behind them, and then again he would break out in a cold perspiration at the thought of the possibility of their not doing so. Again and again he went over the details of the interview with Ketchum, to see if he could detect any flaw in what he had done. His acts stood the test of such scrutiny excellently, and he felt quite well satisfied with what he had done and said. However, there was a sort of aching void in the region of the left breast, which annoyed him not a little, as it seemed, somehow, to hint that all was not well somewhere, though where was more than he could tell.

The point that caused him the greatest amount of satisfaction was the fact that in all he had said he had dropped no hint and made no sign that could possibly lead Ketchum to suspect the real

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purpose of the bombarding. This main secret was still safely locked in his heart, and only he and Goldsby knew anything about it. This was a supreme comfort to him, and reflection upon it was so pleasant that with this uppermost in his mind he got a little restful sleep before daylight. His anxiety returned, however, when he woke, and he had little desire for breakfast when at a late hour in the morning he sat down to a small table in the hotel restaurant. He ran his eye over the bill of fare, but there was nothing on it to tempt his appetite, though the page was crowded with lists of things that were said to be good to eat. He drank a cup of coffee and nibbled a little at a roll, but finally gave the meal up in disgust. The room seemed close and it nettled him that the waiter scowled when he gave him only a quarter for a tip.

Promptly at ten o'clock he entered the office of Ketchum and Markham. Ketchum met him as he came in, and Starleigh took this as a good sign, for it showed that the broker was anxious, or at least that the business was on his mind,—he had evidently remembered it over night. They went at once into the private room, and there Mr. Markham was introduced. The three spent a few minutes on the nothings of politeness, saying conventional words that served only as a screen be-

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hind which they could observe each other and maneuver for position. It was Ketchum who brought things to a head by saying:

"And now, Mr. Starleigh, if you will kindly let Mr. Markham go over what you have to present. I have said nothing to him about the nature of your enterprise, preferring to leave that all to you. I have only let him know that your interview yesterday was of such importance that I desired him to examine and pass upon your plans. My opinion is that it would be well for you to go into all details, as you did with me yesterday; for in affairs of this sort success or failure turns on such small things, on even the minutest details, that we are compelled to make note of everything, from the very start. You made a most exhaustive presentation to me yesterday, and I shall feel particularly obliged if you will go over the same ground for Mr. Markham."

Mr. Markham sat stolidly eyeing Starleigh while Ketchum was talking. He was a large man, heavy featured and phlegmatic. He said little under any circumstances, and his face was expressionless. He never showed the slightest interest in anything, and one could hardly be sure he was listening when talking to him. Sometimes he would look at the person addressing him, but even so, there was nothing in his eye to show that he

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was hearing a word that was said. Talking to him was worse than addressing a post.

But Starleigh was not an entire stranger to the type, and he made the best of the situation. He entered once more upon an exploitation of the plans of the Experimental Sky Bombarding Company, and his enthusiasm held him well up to his work. Ketchum heard the story all over again with his finger pressed against his nose. Markham sat unmoved. Sometimes he would turn his eyes towards Starleigh for an instant, but for the most part he sat heavily in his great armchair and looked at the wall. When Starleigh held up one of the Moisture Supply Company's contracts for his inspection, Markham gazed straight into his eyes and paid no attention whatever to the paper. Starleigh kept on talking, but he wondered to himself what he was talking about; and in thinking the matter over afterwards he was curious as to just what he had said during this part of the interview. Finally he came to the end of his story, and brought his remarks to a fitting close.

The next few minutes made a picture that an artist who has an eye for things as they are might well desire to put on canvas. The three men sat in silence, Ketchum with his finger against his nose, Markham staring at the wall, and Starleigh turning his eyes from one to the other, wondering

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what would come next. How long they remained thus not one of them could have told. To Starleigh, it seemed an eternity. Ketchum looked as though he would be glad to see the end of it. Markham was unmoved. Finally the unexpected happened, and Markham spoke:

"That all?" he said, his words going towards Ketchum rather than Starleigh, though it could not be said, for certain, whom he was addressing.

"That's all he told me yesterday," Ketchum replied. Again there was silence.

And then a curious thing happened. Starleigh's blood suddenly ran cold in his veins, a shiver went over him and he felt his heart sink. At first he was at a loss to account for his feelings. It occurred to him that he must have been sitting in a draft, and he turned to see if there was a window open behind him. Every opening in the room was closed. He hurriedly recounted to himself the most recent points of their interview, and wondered if he had made some break in his story, something that he had not noted at the time. It was while he was thinking about this that it came to him like a flash that the only new factor in the case was the tone of voice in which Ketchum had said "all he told me yesterday." There was a quality in the way this was said that suggested that both the men before him suspected there was

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something kept back,—a something that was of vital importance. Yet neither of them had said so, and Markham still gazed blankly at the wall, while Ketchum held on to his nose. The item that loomed up before Starleigh was what to do next.

“See you to-morrow,” Markham suddenly said, turning neither to the right nor the left, and looking straight before him.

Starleigh was just about to make some reply, when Markham went on, clearing his throat a little as he spoke, and winking his eyes as though he were waking from a trance:

“Tell us the rest of it then. You’ve got something up your sleeve that you haven’t showed down yet.”

And without another word or look the speaker rose from his chair and left the room. He went into the front office, where he gave a few laconic directions to a clerk, then took his hat and went out into the street.

If an earthquake had shaken the place, or a volcano had suddenly burst up through the floor, neither would have surprised Starleigh more than this move of Markham’s. He was stunned. He was scarcely conscious where he was, and he wondered what had happened. He looked about him

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with an air of helpless amazement, and a horror as of great darkness came upon him.

How long this lasted he had no idea. When he came to himself, Ketchum was looking at him steadily, and again his nose and finger were one. In spite of himself, Starleigh felt the blood rush to his face, and instinctively he knew that his secret was out. He could have killed himself, or that part of himself which had betrayed him, if he could have laid his hands on it. He was filled with contempt for a man who had no more bluffing ability than he at this moment felt himself possessed of, and if he could have made a market price for himself, just as he was, it would not have been above two cents.

A moment later, however, a wave of indignation broke over him and a spirit of injured innocence came to his relief. His normal color returned to his face, and he flashed indignant glances into Ketchum's staring eyes. He straightened himself up in his chair, and on the impulse of the moment he said, as if to cast all the blame upon Ketchum:

"You told me that your partner was a gentleman!"

"He is!" Ketchum returned, without changing his position.

"Then your ideas and mine as to what consti-

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tutes a gentleman fail to agree," Starleigh replied sulkily.

"He's peculiar," Ketchum asserted, and then held his peace and cautiously watched the effect of what he had said.

His words had an effect, too, for they threw Starleigh off his feet again, so to speak. They put the affair in a new light, and made Starleigh feel that perhaps he had wronged the man whom he had attacked. They also aroused a fear lest he had broken the cordial relations which he had labored to establish with the firm, and suggested that such rupture might end their negotiations. He was on the point of apologizing for what he had said, but before he could put his thought into speech, the words "up your sleeve," which Markham had uttered, came to his mind, and his blood boiled again. He was about to make an indignant protest to Ketchum, when that gentleman took up the line of thought he had started in on a moment before, and said:

"He's a blunt man, is Markham, and he says what he thinks without weighing his words. I am certain, though, Mr. Starleigh, that he meant no offense in what he said. Reduced to its lowest terms, the simple fact is that he has an idea that there is something about your plan which you haven't yet told, and it seems essential to him that

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we should know the whole story before we put ourselves behind you; or, indeed, before you ask us to seriously consider doing so. For myself," he went on, "I say to you frankly that my opinion now coincides with his, though I shouldn't have felt warranted in saying so if he had not come to his conclusion and announced it as he has done. But, now that he has said it, I feel sure that he is right, and that there is more to tell than you have yet told."

Starleigh set his teeth hard and tried to look like a bored and abused man, while Ketchum went on:

"Mr. Markham has the most acute mind for discerning the ultimate elements of a business scheme that I have ever known anything about. I sometimes think he has a sort of a sixth sense in regard to such affairs, or that he is possessed of a clairvoyant power in that direction. I don't take much stock in that sort of thing, as a rule; but if you knew some of the things that Markham has seen through, or got inklings of without any apparent human aid, you'd wonder, to say the least. And, besides that, you wouldn't think it strange then that he told you to tell the whole story if you wanted us to come in."

Starleigh sat as if he had been caught in a trap. He was as much surprised and chagrined as ani-

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mals usually are under similar circumstances. He could hardly comprehend the situation or believe his own ears, and he felt that he must be struggling with an awful nightmare. But there was no doubt about the reality of what he was confronted with. The clock on the mantel clicked very slowly, and he could hear every stroke. He was certain, also, that the man who sat before him was flesh and blood, and nothing else. He broke out into a cold sweat again, and his hands and feet grew cold. His mental agony was too intense for words to express, and he sat dumb, as though he had suffered a stroke of paralysis. Ketchum watched him for awhile, and then said, in a most reassuring tone:

"Of course we have no desire to pry into your private affairs. If you have secrets in connection with this business that you do not care to divulge, you are entirely at liberty to keep them to yourself. But if you expect us to finance the concern, you must put us in possession of all the facts before we turn a wheel. It is quite possible," he added, "that it might not be at all necessary to take the public into your confidence, for it is often true that the less the people who invest their money know about the inside of the business they take stock in, the better it is for all concerned. Too many cooks spoil the broth, and all great enter-

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prises must be managed by a few men; but so far as brokers are concerned, they won't be trifled with, and with them it is know all or do nothing. I don't urge our services upon you, or volunteer advice, but I might as well say that what is true of our firm in this regard is equally true of any concern of sufficient standing to swing such an enterprise as you wish placed upon the market. And since this is so, you might as well make a show-down for us as for any one else. You'll find the same conditions, wherever you go, and we can give you as good service as any one."

Starleigh still sat in silence. Then Ketchum remarked that he didn't see that there was anything more to be said, on either side, at this interview, Markham having gone away, and suggested that he would be pleased to know Starleigh's decision in the premises, so that he could reserve time for an interview in the morning, if one was desired.

"Give me till three o'clock this afternoon to consider it," said Starleigh.

Ketchum thought a moment, and then said:

"All right! Say yes or no by that time, and it will do." And without another word the interview ended, each party thereto going his several way.

CHAPTER X.

STARLEIGH hurried to the hotel, and began searching for Goldsby by telephone. He knew that his partner had returned to the city that morning, and in quick succession he rang up the various places he was wont to frequent. He was not long in locating his man and in letting him know that he was anxious to see him at the earliest possible moment. Goldsby made excellent time in responding to the call, and before the clock struck one the men were together again.

As Goldsby entered the room he saw at once that the unexpected had happened. Where the break had come he could not imagine, but Starleigh's face told the story of trouble somewhere. He looked ten years older than when they had their last interview, and his countenance was drawn and haggard.

"Good God, man! What has happened?" Goldsby burst out. "Are you sick?"

Starleigh motioned him toward a chair, drank a full glass of whiskey, sat down, and began:

"There's hell to grind and nobody to bear on!" he exclaimed. "I can't tell you how it has come

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about, but I'm into it with both feet, and God only knows how I'll get out again!"

"Quit your damned riddles and get down to business," Goldsby interrupted. "What's wrong? Have Ketchum and Markham gone back on you? If they have, let 'em go, and the devil wish 'em joy! They aren't the only pebbles on the beach, and there's as good fish in the sea as ever were caught. Lord love us, don't get the everlasting blues for a trifle like that!"

He rallied Starleigh all along the line, but to prepare himself for whatever might come, he followed his partner's example and fortified himself with a stiff drink. He set his glass down fiercely, as though he would smash whatever was opposing them, and then turned full towards Starleigh, who thereupon began at the beginning of his interview with the brokers and went straight on through to the final scene. Once or twice during the narrative Goldsby was on the point of interrupting him, to ask some question or make some comment, but Starleigh forged ahead at such a tremendous pace that there was no stopping him, and he made not a single halt from start to finish. When he had ended, Goldsby remarked:

"But they don't know anything! How could they? It's just a bluff to get out of taking hold for us. Let 'em go their gait. We'll find some

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one else on the Street that will jump at the chance to handle what we offer 'em, on our own terms, and without insinuations, either."

Nevertheless, though he spoke thus bravely he got up and walked anxiously about the room. He tried to think of some other firm that he could feel sure would espouse their cause without any further explanations than had been given to Ketchum and Markham, but to his surprise and chagrin none came to him. Still, he felt certain that there must be many such, and for lack of anything else to say, he told Starleigh so, over and over again.

"Well, pick one out," Starleigh said after a while. "It is easy enough to go beating about the bush with generalities, but you are always insisting on being definite. Now's your chance. Name your man." And he paused for Goldsby to reply.

But Goldsby paced the floor and said never a word. The more he thought about the situation the more perplexing it became.

"Damned pity we chose Ketchum and Markham in the first place," he finally said. "Who'd ever have thought that such a stupid looking cuss as old Markham would be so hell-fire knowing when it comes to a show-down. I always thought from his looks that he hadn't sense enough to go in

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when it rained, and here he has put us in the hole like an expert."

"That's just what he is, though he don't look it within a thousand miles," Starleigh replied, "and it's a great misfortune that we ever went near him at all; but what's done, can't be undone; the question still remains, what shall we do next?"

"Of course, the trouble about going to some one else now," Goldsby put in, as though he were weakening from his first bold stand, "is that it will be known on the Street that Ketchum and Markham have had a chance at us, and turned us down. That will tend to make other firms more careful, and may lead them to suspect just what these men have figured out."

"That's just it," Starleigh replied; "if the notion once gets started that we're having to hawk the market for a customer, we're done for, beyond hope of redemption. That's what has been flooring me for the last two hours. As you say, I don't give a damn for Ketchum and Markham, but since we've started in with them, it seems as if it was a dead open and shut that we've got to stay with 'em. And if we do stay with 'em, and get anything out of 'em, there don't seem to be any way out except to make a clean show-down; for you might as well try to change the position of the north star as to attempt to budge Markham from

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a position he has once taken. I can handle the earth, but a man like him is too much for me!"

He paced awhile in silence, and then continued:

"Haven't we got anything more that we can put behind the Experimental Sky Bombarding Company, to make it show up a surer thing?"

"Not so much as a puff of Nebraska wind," Goldsby replied. "I worked that lead out to a finish the first time I went over the ground. It seemed to me that it showed pay dirt, all the way through, on the contract basis I gave you, and I swear I can't make it seem any other way to me, even now."

"Perhaps you could make Markham see it that way, if you got a fair chance at him," Starleigh remarked.

"Not if he'd look into my eyes when I was holding a paper up for him to inspect," said Goldsby. "The man who would do a thing of that sort is not to be convinced with anything short of a first-class club. You've sized him up just right, and have done all with him that anybody could do. God knows I have no desire to tackle him." And then he resumed his floor walking.

"And still the vision tarries," Starleigh urged after awhile. "We've got only an hour to decide, so far as these men are concerned, and the minutes are going by."

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"Can't you give away a part of the snap to 'em, just enough to get 'em to take hold of this block of stock, but keep the bulk of the scheme dark?" Goldsby suggested.

This was a new idea, and both men thought rapidly about its feasibility for the next few minutes.

"You needn't tell 'em, for instance, about draining the Amazon valley, or flooding New York. I believe it would do as well just to confine yourself to the other side of the world, Russia, and Africa, and that sort of thing. Nobody cares a damn about what anybody does to foreigners, anyhow, and they are always counted as legitimate prey for any one who can do 'em up. It will be the most natural thing in the world for you to talk that part of the business, for you've got to show 'em where you'll move the north pole to, and they can't help seeing that wherever the pole is it will of necessity be the sole occupant of the territory. Always been exclusive, the pole has," he added with a laugh. He was fully convinced now that the plan he was unfolding would work to perfection, and it was easy to be facetious on the rebound from the perplexing condition of affairs they had just experienced.

Starleigh was with him in an instant, the possibilities that lay latent in this new proposition un-

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folding before his imagination with almost lightning rapidity. He was on familiar ground now, and was as bold as a lion in a moment.

"Why, yes," he burst out; "of course it's the thing, and the wonder to me is that I haven't thought of it before. But the fact is, I was so eternally surprised at what Markham said that it knocked me clear off my feet, and set my head in such a whirl that I hardly had sense enough to get out of the room and find the hotel. Beats the devil," he went on, "what an idiot a man can be when he gets a biff that takes his wind.

"But I'm good for him now," he continued. "Just keep your eye on the day and date, if you want to see things happen. You've healed the breach, Goldsby, old boy, and I'll send up a special vote of thanks to a gracious heaven, when I say my prayers to-night, that ever you came my way. It is true as gospel that it is not good for man to dwell alone. If it hadn't been for you, right here and now, I should have been wrecked, with beam ends on the shore. But I'm not wrecked, not by a large majority! On the contrary, I've got my nose to the wind, nothing but open water ahead, and steam in the boiler up to the safety limit. Oh, I'll sail till I make old Markham's head swim! I'll teach him to look

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me in the eye when I want him to see something else! ”

He danced about the room as he said these things, and almost forgot that he had agreed to make a definite reply to the brokers by three o'clock. Goldsby called his attention to this, and Starleigh calmed down enough to attend to the matter. He telephoned the firm that he would see them in the morning, but said nothing further. Then he returned to Goldsby.

He found his partner in a thoughtful mood and almost inclined to be glum. Starleigh was surprised at this, for he himself was in the third heaven of assurance, and the only thing he was eager for was to meet Ketchum and Markham again. He longed for the hour of their conference to arrive, and could hardly wait for the time to go by. He picked Goldsby up jovially, and began to compliment him further on the way he had put him, Starleigh, on his feet again. Then he proceeded to elaborate some of the details of how he would unfold their plans to the financiers, just how much and just how little he would tell. Goldsby listened, but still maintained his anxious manner. Finally he said:

“The thing that is grinding me is, what will be gained if you do make this partial show-down?”

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Starleigh caught his breath and stared. Here was a new feature, and one that he had never thought of. Goldsby went on:

"We haven't got anything new in the line of money value to offer them by the disclosure, and nothing that will convince them that the stock of the Experimental Sky Bombarding Company will ever pan out, on the basis that it is issued on. All we propose to put behind the stock is a mortgage on a certain part of the crop of Nebraska; and now if we give it away that we're going to put the whole state down so near the equator that it will be burned to a solid brick, why, we're done up on that line."

"Why didn't you think of that before?" Starleigh gasped, "before I'd telephoned I'd see 'em in the morning? Great God, what has happened to us? Can't we either of us have more than one thought at a time, and that one so dead wrong that it won't hold water for half an hour?"

He was pale again, and the signs of his previous helplessness were fast returning upon him. It seemed to him that the situation was now worse than ever, and he felt that he simply could not face Ketchum and Markham again. He dropped heavily into a chair and inwardly cursed his own fate and everybody else's.

Goldsby kept on thinking. At length he said:

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"The fact is, old man, we're in the hands of a pair of sharks, and the prospect of being eaten alive disturbs our powers of connected thought, especially when we are in their more immediate presence. The situation makes us think too fast, and no man can do thinking that will stand the strain of things as they are if he has to be in a hurry about it. That's the philosophy of a police sweat box. They get a suspected man into their power, and then they hurry him in his thinking department; and right there is where they do him up. That was how Markham laid you out and why I have put my foot in it again in the proposition you've just acted on. If we only had time! Oh hell!" And he flung himself across the room in desperation.

But, struggle as they would, not a particle of the strain that was upon them was removed. Neither swearing nor praying did any good, and the question of "What next?" loomed before them like a blank wall that it was impossible to scale or bore through. When they went to bed it rode them like a nightmare, and they passed a weary night, though their beds were of down.

But with the morning, a possible solution occurred to Goldsby. It came to him like a flash, and just as he awoke from a troubled doze into which he had dropped. He sat straight up in bed

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the moment he fully grasped the idea, and, hearing Starleigh stir in his uneasy bed, he called out to him across the parlor that separated their rooms:

"Say, old man, I'm not sure that this is the thing, but I'll submit it as the best I can get hold of at present."

Starleigh was out of bed in an instant, and rushing into the parlor he sat down in one of the great chairs, clad only in his pajamas. Goldsby piled the pillows up behind his own shoulders, and leaning back on them he went on to tell what had occurred to him as possible.

"Of course, if you go down there this morning (and I don't see but that you've got to go, now that you've agreed to, or the fat will be all in the fire), you've got to have some well-matured plan for making a move that will head off this precious pair if they try to play horse with you again. That's what's worried me all night."

"Same here!" Starleigh interlarded.

"But I really believe I've got a scheme now that will hold 'em down. It came to me just as I woke up, a few minutes ago. That's when the best things come to me, just as I'm waking up. I've had it happen a hundred times, till I've come to count on it as a something to be relied on. I felt, when we went to bed last night, that if there

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was any way out it would come to me early this morning, and it's here."

"Damn pity you don't sleep most of the time and wake up often!" Starleigh put in. He was desperate now, and felt that they might as well laugh as cry over the situation.

Goldsby made no reply to the remark, but went on:

"All those fellows care for is money."

"Sure!" said Starleigh. "Didn't have to go to sleep and wake up to discover that, did you? A dead man would know that, even after he'd been embalmed!" He was bitter now, and cared for nothing.

Goldsby paid no attention to these asides, but pursued the even tenor of his way. The two knew each other through and through.

"They don't give a continental whether the stock of the Experimental Sky Bombarding Company ever pays a cent or not. So long as they can get a dollar out of it, they are happy. And you show them where they can make another dollar by putting this stock on the market, and they are your meat."

Starleigh pricked up his ears and arranged his nightclothes as if he would like to be a trifle more presentable in the presence of good tidings. Goldsby proceeded:

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"Now, if they force you to play, why not do this,—I merely suggest it," he added, with due humility of spirit, as he called to mind his previous failures,—“why not tell them that we will enter into a contract with them that they shall handle the real estate that will have to be transferred in settling the Russians on what is now the Desert of Sahara? We've got to have some one to handle the stuff, and it might as well be them as anybody. You can show them that the whole desert can be bought for next to nothing, before we begin to turn things around, and that the profit in it will be practically the whole thing, and that we can afford to give 'em a rake-off that will satisfy even a shark.” There was bitterness in the last word, but the provocation was great.

“Good enough!” roared Starleigh, as he leaped from his chair and cut a pigeon wing; “Goldsby, old boy, you are a brick of bricks! I was going to say bric-à-brac, but that's too thin to do the subject justice. You're a thoroughbred, and your waking thoughts are nothing short of miracles. Pull down your pillows and go to sleep again, and you'll have a codicil to even this last proposition when you wake up. You needn't fish for it, though. This that you've got is good enough. It'll hold, and I know it. I'm armed to the teeth now, and all that I ask is a chance to

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use my weapons. Come, get up, and we'll go to breakfast."

Goldsby was not so sanguine as Starleigh appeared to be, but both were in a fairly good mood after this, and they both did full justice to the bill of fare when, an hour later, they sat down to the table.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was with a light heart and as one who is sure of winning the game that Starleigh set out that morning for the office of Ketchum and Markham. He stepped briskly into a cab and told the driver to make good time to the address he had given him. As they drove through the crowded streets they were stopped more than once by blocked crossings, and these delays were very annoying to Starleigh, who was impatient to get to his work. When he finally arrived at his destination, he found that he was a few minutes ahead of time, and for fear he should seem to be over-anxious about the interview, he directed the driver to take a turn around the block to kill a few minutes. As they came around again the clock was just on the stroke, and Starleigh went up the steps as it was striking the hour.

Ketchum was not in waiting this morning, but he appeared immediately upon Starleigh's sending in his card, and they went at once into the office which had been the scene of their former interviews. Markham was seated in the great arm-chair, exactly as before, and looked as though he

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had not left the spot for twenty-four hours, though Starleigh was painfully aware that he had done so, as the memory came over him of his abrupt leaving the previous day. He felt his anger rising as the scene came before him, but he put the impulse aside, crushing it with the thought of the ultimate triumph he knew was just ahead. He greeted Markham with perfect cordiality, and was sure he looked and acted as if nothing perverse had happened.

Markham returned his good morning, but addressed the salutation to the wall straight before him. His attitude was that of impatient waiting, as who should say: "Tell what you must; talk to the point; be quick about it, and then get out!" There was always this air about Markham, though he never seemed to be in a hurry about anything he did himself. On the contrary, he moved and spoke with great deliberation. But he made the impression on every one that he had quantities of business to attend to, and that his time was very precious. Besides this, he always seemed to be on the verge of being bored by whatever was said to him.

These things did not annoy Starleigh in the least, on this occasion. He felt sure, now, that Markham was only posing for effect, and he wondered that he had not recognized the fact before.

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However, he knew it now, and his spirits boomed to the top notch as he remembered that a poser is the last man in the world to be afraid of. Indeed, he felt as though it would be rather small business to be the means of undoing such a party, and he really wished for the moment when he should have bigger game to fall upon. It was in this mood that he began to talk of the business in hand at the present interview.

"I am sure," he said, "both you gentlemen will agree with me that there is no need of apology on my part for my not having gone further with my explanations of our business at our former interviews. At least, if it does not seem so to you now, I am certain it will do so as we proceed."

He was quite formal in his manner of speech, as though he were too dignified a person ever to be suspected of even thinking of apologizing for anything that he ever had done or might do. Markham cleared his throat, but said nothing, and Starleigh continued:

"As business men of the day, you are well aware that counsel is always supposed to present only so much of his case as he judges is essential to its successful issue. Indeed, I am certain you will agree with me that it would be decidedly bad form to do otherwise, and to volunteer information which he did not consider necessary to secure

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a verdict in his favor. However, his having made but a partial showing at the outset does not debar him from amending his plea as the case progresses, if circumstances seem to indicate that it is best for him to do so."

"Tell what you've got up your sleeve!" Markham broke in, looking straight before him as he spoke.

It is hard to bear insult, no matter where it comes from, and Starleigh felt like smashing Markham's nose for this, as it seemed to him, brutal remark. But he held his temper and proceeded as though nothing had been said, directing his remarks to Ketchum, and trying to ignore Markham altogether.

"In our former interviews," he went on, "I submitted what seemed to me enough of our plans to convince you that they would warrant us in issuing the block of stock we propose to put upon the market, and to induce you to finance the securities for us; but if you are not yet satisfied with what we have heretofore offered, I am proud to say that we have further backing to bring forward, and that it is a pleasure to us to present it for your approval."

"Show it down, then," said Markham; and Starleigh continued to talk.

He began at the beginning of the north pole



"What'll it do to Nebraska?" Page 178.

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project and proceeded to unfold it with great minuteness. He had brought along a pocket globe to aid him in his explanations, and at the proper moment he produced it. He put one finger on the spot occupied by Cherry County, Nebraska, and another on what would ultimately be the location of the north pole, when the new order of things should be established. He traced the line of the new equator, and dwelt at length on the fact that it would pass through the Cape of Good Hope. He said nothing about where it would go on the western hemisphere, that being a part of the case he still felt he was not required to present. At least, he resolved he would not expose that part of the plan till it was called for.

As Starleigh proceeded with his showing, he happened to turn towards Markham, whom he thought he was entirely ignoring, addressing himself only to Ketchum; and he was surprised, not to say startled, to observe that the stolid man of his former observations was leaning forward in his chair, his eyes fixed intently upon the globe and his whole attitude showing that he was intensely interested in what was going on. For a moment Starleigh was quite taken aback, but he rallied instantly, and a great thrill of triumph swept over him as he realized that he had at last made an impression upon a man he had counted

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as beyond the reach of any emotion whatever. He chuckled to himself, and inwardly remarked: "Aha, aha, villain! I have thee now, and I'll do thee to a turn or ere I let thee up!" This was in a substratum of mental activity, however, for he paused not an instant in his recital of his business while this aside was going on in another department of his mind. But the discovery spurred him to greater acuteness of invention than he had ever before been conscious of, and he felt as though he were a match for anything as he spoke.

He was just about to enter upon the details of what would happen to the Desert of Sahara, and how his plan was to locate the Russians in that redeemed area, etc., etc., when Markham broke in, as he reached out and took the globe from Starleigh and held it closer to himself where he could get a better view of it:

"What'll it do to Nebraska?" he said.

Under ordinary circumstances, such a question, so utterly opposite to the line of thought Starleigh was pursuing, would have swept him off his feet; but he was in an ecstasy of assurance now, and this cross-purpose acted as a stimulant to his already highly wrought imagination. Quick as a flash an answer came to him, a reply that he had never thought of before, and with an ease and grace of manner which seemingly indicated that

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of all questions in the world the one put was the easiest to answer, and that it would specially delight him to furnish the information sought on this point, he turned to Markham and said:

“Why, this is what it will do for Nebraska: It will put that state into the tropics, and make a tropical country of it, with all that such term implies. It will give it a location that will insure a rainfall every season and increase its productive power ten times over!”

As Starleigh said this he wondered at himself, and wondered what manner of man he really was. It came to him that there was no limit to his inventive ability, and that he could rely on it with perfect assurance under all circumstances. He realized that what he had just stated was the very reverse of what he had said to Goldsby a few hours previous, but it seemed to him now that it was much nearer the probable truth than his former notion had been. He wondered how it was that this condition of the removed state had never occurred to him before.

As he continued to think about it, it suddenly occurred to him that this answer might be sufficient to win all he wanted from the brokers before him, and that if this were so, there would then be no need of his going into details as to the effects on the rest of the world, that would result from

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up-ending the earth as he proposed to do,—that he need not say anything about the real-estate deal at all. The moment he saw this probable outcome, he proceeded to make the most of it. Leaving Russia and Sahara to look out for themselves he devoted himself to following up the details of the New Nebraska. He straightened himself to his full height, and proceeded in a tone of assured triumph; albeit with due modesty withal, as if he could afford not to overdo a sure thing.

“And now you can see, gentlemen, now that you are clear on the inside,” he said, “what basis we really have for our stock.”

He paused for a minute to give his auditors time to fully comprehend the situation, and then proceeded:

“You will doubtless recall ” (this with an air of apology to Markham, as if he feared he might not remember the fact because he had not observed it carefully enough when he had a chance of doing so, the day before); “You will doubtless recall the fact that, by the terms of our contracts with the farmers of Nebraska, we shall forever be entitled to one-half the increase in the crop of that entire state caused by our bombarding. I need not go over the figures again, for repetitions are always a bore.”

He turned like a modest giant, as who should

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say: "Now, will you be good?" But he only halted for an instant, and then went on:

"As you think about it, you will realize that our dividends will be so enormous that our stock will double and quadruple in value in a very short time, and we shall be able to water it, several times over, inside of ten or a dozen years."

"Why didn't you tell us this in the first place?" Markham interrupted.

It was a startling thrust, but in Starleigh's present mood it seemed to him but boy's play. He replied instantly:

"I was looking for that question, which it is but natural you should ask." It had never occurred to him till that minute that such an inquiry was possible, but he was equal to anything now. "But, as I told you awhile ago, I am averse to volunteering information that is not called for, and I thought it better to wait till you asked this question before I made reply. The reason I went no further with you about our plans in our former interviews was that it is very essential that this main secret of what we are going to do should be kept close. In saying this, I make no reflections on the ability of you gentlemen to keep a secret, but as experienced financiers you know very well that the best way to keep things that should not be generally known right where they belong, is not

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to tell them to anybody, unless you have to. My partner and I both felt that there was sufficient backing for all we asked for in what I presented yesterday; and if there was, we thought it would be wise to go no further than we were obliged to. But as you gentlemen thought differently about it, we yielded (I trust with good grace), and gave you the inside. These are the rock-bottom reasons for what we did and did not do, and I am sure they will meet your approval."

"We'll float the stuff for you!" Markham announced, and then, as before, he arose and left the room without another word.

Starleigh caught his breath as though he were facing a hurricane. He could hardly believe his ears, or bring himself to realize that it was all over, and that he had won his victory without a single shot from the big guns he had loaded for the conflict. He wanted to shout, to yell, to kick up his heels. He longed to get the news to Goldsby, and wondered how he would receive it. These and a thousand other fancies flew through his mind and made him almost unconscious of where he was. But Ketchum still sat before him with his finger on his nose, and Starleigh felt that he must be disposed of before he himself could give full vent to his feelings. With this in mind, he faced the remaining broker squarely and said,

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nodding towards the door Markham had just gone through:

"Curious old party, isn't he?"

"He is the most remarkable man I have ever known in all my life," Ketchum responded. There was something like awe in his tone of voice, and his face told of far more than his words expressed. His whole manner indicated that he felt himself, and all concerned, to be on the edge of some great dénouement, the nature of which he had no idea about. Starleigh felt a chill coming over him again. It could not be possible that it was all a dream. He hastened to say:

"He'll handle our stock all right, won't he?"

"Sure!" Ketchum replied. "You needn't worry a moment about that." Starleigh's heart returned to its normal place and regular beating, and Ketchum continued:

"Go right ahead with your work with the Nebraska legislature, and all the rest of it. You and I will have all the details of the business to arrange. Markham never does anything of that kind. All he does is to pass upon the deals that are submitted to us, and I do the rest. But he is a wonderful man!"

Starleigh said that he was sure he was, and after he had considered a few minor points with Ketchum he bade that gentleman good morning, and started for his hotel.

CHAPTER XII.

STARLEIGH found Goldsby waiting for him when he reached their rooms. He could hardly wait to close the door behind him before he broke out into a shout. Then he fell into a chair and laughed and laughed and held his sides till Goldsby began to fear he had gone mad. After awhile he straightened himself up and began to relate what had taken place at their interview.

“ Oh, Goldsby, old man, I’ve done it this time! I’ve— ”

But Goldsby cut him off.

“ Will they float our stuff? ” he questioned.

“ That’s what I want to know. ”

Starleigh roared again, and between his bursts of hilarity he managed to articulate:

“ Float it?—Why, old boy, they’ll kite it!—They’ll boom it!—They’ll sky-whoop it!—They’ll fall over each other to get at it, and no matter how much we give ’em, they’ll yell for more! ” And again he collapsed with laughter.

Goldsby stood looking at him and wondering what it was all about.

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After a few minutes Starleigh subsided enough to talk continuously.

"Old man," he said, "you needn't ever tell me there isn't such a thing as inspiration. If I haven't been inspired this morning, no man ever was. I don't know whether it was a devil or an angel that inspired me, and I don't care a damn, either way. But I got help from outside, somehow, and it did the work to beat the band."

Then he proceeded to tell Goldsby all that had happened, and it is only fair to say that they both wondered at the outcome. They remarked how sudden the conclusion was, and they felicitated themselves on Starleigh's cleverness in the quick tack he took when what was apparently a storm was upon him.

"You're a genius, Starleigh, my boy," Goldsby said, "and that's the long and short of it. Great head! Great head!" he exclaimed, reaching forward and patting Starleigh on the forehead.

They talked the subject over and over for an hour or two, and tried to familiarize themselves with the feeling that their plans were now realized, that it only remained to carry them out. On the strength of their assured millions they took lunch in their room, ordering a bill of fare that would have made a king green with envy. They sat long over the meal, and when it was ended

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they were still talking on the subject that alone occupied their minds.

"Well, the next thing is something else," Goldsby finally remarked. "And I suppose the next turn of the wheel is for me to furbish up my cough, get my consumptive tone into repair again, and make ready to live with our friend Goodpasture for a few weeks. Wish to God I could take this hotel with me," he continued, glancing over the remains of the meal on the table before them, and pouring another glass of wine.

They were smoking now, and under the combined influence of their cigars and their well satisfied appetites they were silent for awhile. Their faces were partly turned away from each other as they sat. Starleigh leaned back in his chair and had a mind to take a nap. As his head fell back, however, he glanced into a mirror across the room and his eyes rested on the reflected form of Goldsby, whose pose and every feature suggested intense thoughtfulness and great anxiety.

Starleigh watched him unnoticed for a few minutes, till he was certain he was suffering from something very disagreeable that was on his mind. He could not imagine what was troubling him in this hour of their assured success. Finally the thought came to him that Goldsby wasn't as sure of Goodpasture as he had declared himself to be.

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He could readily understand how, if such were the case, his partner should be troubled, now that the time had come when he must carry out that part of their plans. After a few minutes he turned toward Goldsby and said:

"What's hurting you? You look as though you had lost your last friend. Getting anxious about Goodpasture, now that you've got to go up against him?"

"Never you fret about Goodpasture," Goldsby replied. "You can stake your life he'll never give us any trouble. I wish to God we could be as sure of Markham." And he looked Starleigh full in the eye.

"Why, for God's sake, what's the matter with Markham?" Starleigh exclaimed, sitting bolt upright. "Hasn't he promised everything we want him to, and hasn't Ketchum backed up what he said? I asked Ketchum, after Markham went out, if it was a dead sure thing that they would take hold for us,—if there was any danger of a break, and he swore there wasn't the least doubt in the world about it, that all we had to do now was to go ahead with the details and everything would be O. K. What more can we ask than that?"

"He was too damned easy," Goldsby replied. There was suspicion and disgust in every word he

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spoke, and Starleigh was on his feet in an instant. He felt that he couldn't have it that way, and was going on to argue the case,—to prove that Markham must be all right, when Goldsby took the floor.

“Do you remember,” he said, “in the play of *Richelieu*, in the scene between the Cardinal and Huget, how, after they had parted, and the soldier, without a word of objection, had agreed to everything Richelieu had asked him, the old Cardinal thought it all over, and then said: ‘I like it not. He bowed too low. ’Tis not his natural way.’ And that’s what’s worrying me about Markham. He went off too quick, especially for the send-off you gave him.”

Starleigh winced at this. The same thought had occurred to him, but he had put it from him and would none of it. And to have Goldsby impressed in the same way didn't please him. And yet, what could there be wrong? He went hurriedly over the final points in the interview of the morning, but no flaw appeared to him.

“Oh, don't fret, old man,” he finally said. “Ketchum told the whole story when he said that Markham is peculiar. He probably happened to think of something else just then—something that he had to attend to right away—and so he left without a word. He's not much given to polite

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usages, I can tell you that. Maybe he was in a hurry to get a drink. I don't know. You never can account for all the doings of a man like him."

"You said he was greatly interested in what you showed up about moving the pole," Goldsby remarked, "took the globe and looked it all over, and—"

"Yes," Starleigh interrupted; "but don't you see that his interest was all settled on Nebraska? I purposely kept away from that side of the globe. because, you know, that was according to the plan I was working on up to that point. I was just going ahead with the Russia and Sahara business when all of a sudden he plumped in on me with 'What'll you do to Nebraska?' I told him what we would do with it, and as soon as he saw the point he came to terms. He's a man of few words, and when he makes up his mind, that settles it, and he gets out. Oh, he's all right. I'll bet a horse he couldn't tell now, to save his life, how it is we propose to move the pole; and I don't believe he got a single idea out of the whole thing, only that we should have a cinch on Nebraska that would make big dividends a dead sure thing and give us a chance to water our stock several times over during his lifetime. That's all he got out of it, and I know it. He's a man of a single idea, Markham is, and the one bit of illumi-

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nation that flashes from that soggy brain is all described in the two words, *twenty percent*. Light another cigar;" and he held a fresh one out to Goldsby.

"Well, maybe it's all right," Goldsby responded, as he bit the end off the weed and felt for a match; "but I wish to the Lord he hadn't been so quick about it. That's what gets me. But probably you are right about it. You were on the ground, and you've seen the man and had a chance to study him. Anyhow, we won't cross the bridge till we come to it;" and he lighted his cigar.

"He can't do anything, anyway," Starleigh remarked, rather loath to abandon the subject. "Even if he had it in for us, I can't see how he could harm us, so long as he floats our stock."

"Oh, let it go," Goldsby exclaimed, wearying of the discussion and beginning to feel sleepy himself now that Starleigh's defense had quieted his fears somewhat. "Let it go. I've really no business with this part of the work. I'll keep hands off, hereafter, and devote myself solely to my rural friends who now occupy the immediate territory to be covered by our scene of action."

Then he coughed dramatically, and said in a husky and apparently phlegm-clogged voice, while his eyes twinkled merrily:

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“ Fill up, and we’ll drink to the health and future good behavior of the two chief actors in the next act of our great play. Here’s to Good-pasture and Markham! ” he went on, holding his full glass high, and clinking it against Starleigh’s ditto, with great spirit. “ May they both live as long as we can use them, and when they die may the Lord have mercy on their souls! ”

They drained the glasses to the last drop and clasped hands across the table. Then Starleigh rang for the waiter to clear away the dishes, and the two men went into the street.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR the next ten days both Starleigh and Goldsby were busy, each making ready for the especial work that lay before him. They kept their rooms at the hotel, but did not see much of each other, for they belonged to different clubs. They were not particularly "sporty," either of them, but their motto was, "Live while you live," and they were true to the sentiment, both in letter and spirit. They witnessed a couple of boxing matches together during the time, and as the era of football was then on, they went out to a game one afternoon. But for the most part, they attended strictly to business.

It was late in the evening of a day that had been more than usually full of wearying detail work that Goldsby returned to their rooms. He was tired and anxious to get to bed. He was really glad to find that Starleigh had not yet come in. He turned on a single light, only enough to see to get to bed by, for his eyes were weary of the glare of the streets.

By the dim light he saw an unopened letter

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lying on the table. His first impulse was to let it stay where it was till morning. He was in no mood for news, good or bad, and the business day was long past, so that if the letter had to do with financial matters nothing could be done about it till the next day, anyhow. However, out of sheer curiosity he picked up the letter and read its address:

G. W. Starleigh,
Hotel Hoffland,
City.

The upper left-hand corner of the envelope bore the firm name and address of Ketchum and Markham. Goldsby's eye caught that before he had read the superscription, and his heart stood still the instant he saw it. He could not tell why it should do so, for there were plenty of reasons why the firm should write to his partner. Nevertheless, there was a lump in his breast as he stood there with the letter in his hand. Stepping over to the side of the room he pressed the button which turned on all the lights in the apartment, and in the glare that followed he tore open the letter and read as follows:

DEAR SIR:

Will you kindly call at our office at ten o'clock to-morrow morning and oblige,

Yours truly,
KETCHUM AND MARKHAM.

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Surely there was nothing in that to cause alarm. He called himself a cowardly idiot who was afraid of less than nothing, put out the lights and hurried to bed.

But he could not sleep. He tossed about continually, and kept wondering all the while what it was that the brokers wanted to see Starleigh about.

In the course of an hour Starleigh came in. Goldsby called out to him from his bedroom:

"Hello, old man! I beat you in! I found a letter waiting from Ketchum and Markham. It's on the table there. Nothing important I guess. They want to see you in the morning, that's all."

Starleigh read the letter and then stood still looking at it silently for a long time. He turned it over as if he were searching for something more. Goldsby could see him, and he swore to himself over what he saw. He was certain that the effect of the letter was the same upon Starleigh that it had been upon himself, and his anxiety was increased by the discovery. He held his peace for awhile, but finally said:

"Know what they want to see you about?"

Starleigh turned the letter over once more, stared at the blank page thus revealed, then tossed it on the table and drew a long breath.

"Oh, I suppose it's some trifle about the form

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of the stock, or something like that. They are awfully particular about those things. I spent four hours one day going over the thing with Ketchum and their lawyers. I thought we had the matter settled then, but probably they've discovered some insignificant break somewhere, and want to see me about it. It's nothing. Everything has run as though it was greased since they took hold for us, and there can't any break come now. The business is too far along for that."

"I hope to God it is!" Goldsby groaned.

"Of course it is!" Starleigh replied, and without another word they subsided for the night.

.

Promptly at ten o'clock the next day Starleigh appeared at the office of Ketchum and Markham. He had become so familiar with the place by this time that he went at once to the private apartment, and on this occasion he did not wait to knock at the door, but entered entirely unannounced. Ketchum came forward and greeted him warmly, and Markham actually looked at him as he said good morning.

But Starleigh did not look at Markham. His eyes became otherwise engaged the moment he entered the room, and it was not till long afterwards that he removed them from the object that held them with an almost hypnotic power. He

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took Ketchum's hand, or rather Ketchum took his, and he was conscious that they shook conventionally, but he never looked that way.

The object that thus absorbed Starleigh's thought and vision was an immense globe, nearly four feet in diameter, which was standing on the table at which Markham was seated, and almost hiding that gentleman from view. It was the largest globe Starleigh had ever seen, and it appeared bigger than it really was, standing there on the table in a small room. There was no reason why it should startle Starleigh, however, for he was intimately familiar with everything pertaining to the globe business, and had been especially so for the last year or two. Yet, somehow, the sight of it, all so sudden, upset him, and it was several minutes before he recovered from the shock. While he was in this unsettled frame of mind Markham continued to look at him steadily. Ketchum quietly retreated to his chair and sat waiting.

Markham was the first to speak:

"How do you like it?" he asked, laconically, and looking Starleigh straight in the eye.

"It's immense!" said Starleigh, without the least idea of being facetious. "It's the finest of the kind I ever set eyes on, and I've seen a good many, one way and another."

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"Had it built a-purpose," Markham went on to explain. "Wanted one that would show the whole thing. Didn't know but you had one, but we wanted one here in the office."

It seemed strange to Starleigh to hear Markham talk so much. In all his intercourse with the firm he had never known him to be so voluble. He had not supposed it possible for him to utter so many words consecutively. While he was wondering over this, his eyes still fastened on the globe, it suddenly occurred to him that what he saw was a supreme proof of the tremendous enthusiasm that Markham had developed in their cause, and he thought of what a fool Goldsby had made of himself the night before in fearing that the brokers had something untoward to communicate, and that this was their reason for sending for him. What a senseless thing fear was, anyhow! He had suffered a great deal from it himself, one time and another. He even lay awake quite awhile last night wondering. And now, see what the facts were. These men were so earnest in his behalf that they had had this splendid globe built at their own expense, on purpose to exploit his scheme. Who should say now that there was no such thing as generosity in business? And Markham had done this! He would never doubt a fellow-mortal again, be the provocation what it

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might, and fear he would forever banish from his soul.

With these thoughts passing through his mind, he addressed Markham, whom he now felt he had greatly wronged heretofore.

"It's a fine piece of work," he said, "and I'm glad you've got it; but of course you'll keep it where no one can see it till the proper time?" In his surprise, he had not thought of this point till just then.

"Oh, we'll keep it dark," Markham replied; "but we wanted to see how the thing would look, all painted up as it will be after you get in your work with your guns. See?" And he nodded his head toward the great ball before him.

Starleigh stepped up nearer to the table and began to examine the globe more closely. He then observed for the first time that it had been constructed as Markham had indicated, and showed the world as it would be after the transformation they proposed to make. The north pole had been removed from its original site and properly located in the heart of Russia. That was the first thing he noticed, and he was surprised to think that his single presentation of their plans a few mornings before had made so accurate an impression upon those who heard him. He remembered, though, that he had dwelt at con-

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siderable length on this part of the showing, and that he had placed his finger exactly on the spot the new north pole would occupy. Yes, and Markham had taken the globe from his hand and looked at it. But the accuracy of the work before him was surprising, none the less. He wondered how well they had got the rest of it, and continued his examination.

He turned the globe about on its new axis and traced the line of the new equator as it rolled over. It was correctly located. He felt that he himself could not have done the work better.

Still wondering, but saying never a word, he began to look at the map of the reconstructed world; and, to start on a part with which he was most familiar, he turned the globe so that the Americas would come under his eye. It was then that he got a shock that took his breath away and almost threw him into a state of complete collapse.

For, see! As the new map of this part of the world appeared on the globe before him, North and South America were no longer connected by the Isthmus of Panama; but, instead, they were separated by an ocean several hundred miles in width. The Gulf of Mexico had entirely disappeared as such, and the northern shore of what had once been that body of water was far and away above the old Mason and Dixon's line. Of

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course this was all as it ought to be,—as it would be under the new order of things. But the item that paralyzed Starleigh, as he looked at what was staring him in the face, was the fact that he had never mentioned these points to either of the men before him. This was what he had agreed there was no need of showing up, and what he never had showed up. The puzzle was how it could possibly appear as it did on this globe?

Could Goldsby have been false and betrayed the secret? He would not believe it, though the heavens fell! Yet Goldsby was the only soul in all the world to whom he had ever told these things and he himself had never made a written record of them. And here was the map, as perfect as though he had directed its making himself. It was beyond belief that it should be so, yet here it was!

He ran his eye down the globe to see how South America looked, only to find that this part of the map was as correctly drawn as that he had already observed. The Orinoco and Amazon valleys appeared high and dry, and there was a vast area of redeemed ocean bed, now dry land, where the deltas of these rivers had been. He was speechless with astonishment and utterly oblivious to where he was, till Markham's voice recalled him to himself, as he said:

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"Look natural to you?"

Starleigh was on the point of saying no, but he checked the impulse, as he saw that such denial might be used to his disadvantage. If he had not thought all this out, and should acknowledge that fact, the discovery might be claimed by some one else. Indeed, the very men with whom he was closeted might declare it as their own original find. He saw the danger, and was quick to avoid it by asking a question himself, instead of replying to the one which had been asked him:

"What have you got your shore line on the south of the United States so far up for?" he queried.

He hoped Markham would reply that he didn't know, or hadn't noticed that it was so, or something of the sort,—anything which would go to show that he didn't understand the real change that would result from moving the equator. But no such relief was waiting for him. Without a moment's hesitation, Markham replied:

"That's where it'll be when you get your pole stuck in the new place," he said.

Starleigh staggered, but he pulled himself together and came back at Markham, who now seemed to be changed into a deadly assailant.

"Who told you that?" he demanded.

"Nobody," Markham returned, without the

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slightest show of emotion. "Anybody who has ever studied geography would know that without telling." And then he went on and recited, as though he were a boy again and standing in the class: "'The shape of the earth is that of an oblate spheroid.' That means that it's flattened at the poles and bulged half way between 'em, that is, at the equator. Where it bulges, there you'll have deep water. What you're going to do will raise the water in the Gulf of Mexico enough to have it fill up the United States the way it shows on the map. Haven't you figured that out yourself?" he asked, coming back to his unanswered question of a moment before.

Starleigh was wild. He hardly dared trust himself to talk, and yet he was forced to say something. He became desperate, and in a fury he broke out:

"Of course I've thought it out and quantities besides—"

He was going on, but Markham cut him off:

"Had this up your sleeve, too, but didn't propose to show it till it seemed necessary to do so," he said.

If Starleigh could have hurled Jove's thunderbolts at the moment he would have buried Markham under mountains of them.

"You scoundrel!" he yelled, "You thief!

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You infernal robber! You and your precious partner here are planning to steal our whole business, and you haven't a right to a penny of it, except your commissions on the stock you sell for us. Great God, how is it that such a pair of thieves as you are permitted to do business on the Street? But don't you ever think— ”

“ Oh, don't get excited, Mr. Starleigh,” Ketchum broke in, uncrossing his legs and taking his finger off his nose; “ I'm sure you don't know what you're saying, and that when you do comprehend it, you'll regret it. Sit down now, like a reasonable being, and we'll talk this matter over like reasonable men. Nobody has threatened to rob you, no one has talked of robbing you or of doing you or your business harm in any way. You are making charges that you can not sustain, and that you really have no cause whatever for entertaining.”

“ But you've got all my plans mapped out here,” Starleigh answered, pointing to the globe.

“ We don't know whether we've got them all or not,” Markham remarked, “ and that's the very thing we want to find out. Now we know where we are,” he continued. “ Sit down now, like a man, and show up all that you propose to claim by this change that you are going to bring about. I say to you flatly that we have come to a place

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where it is for both your interest and ours that you keep nothing back, and I warn you that whatever you do keep back will work against you in the future."

It was wonderful to hear Markham talk thus,—this ordinarily wordless man. Starleigh marveled at it through his rage and chagrin.

Starleigh sank down into a chair, and as the irony of the situation came over him he couldn't help smiling at it. He had had many and various experiences in life, but this surpassed them all. He had met the enemy and he was theirs. His private plans were now public property, his secret designs upon an unsuspecting world were now where everybody could know about them. The game was up. He was exposed, and stood naked in the sight of two of his fellow-men. There is only one word that will express the horror of such a condition and that is the old word, hell! As Starleigh sat there, he felt sure that there was nothing further that he could possibly suffer, either in this world or any other.

And yet he smiled. The situation was so aggravating that it was absolutely ludicrous.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was not many minutes, however, before Starleigh drifted into a more hopeful mood. He called to mind what Ketchum had said shortly before, and how he had protested that the firm had no intention or desire to rob him, or to harm his business in any way. Perhaps this was true. He would try to think it was; at least he would do so till he had further proof to the contrary. The chief item against the brokers so far, as he saw it, lay in the fact that they had somehow become acquainted with the entire scope of his plans, and had taken the liberty of embodying his ideas, in substantial form, in the immense globe on the table. His thoughts ran on and on along these lines, but the trend of his cogitations was interrupted by Ketchum, who said:

“As Mr. Markham has already intimated, what we want is that you should make us a plain and specific statement of all and everything that you claim, or propose to claim, in connection with this change you are going to make in the axis of the earth.”

“Oh, that’s easy,” Starleigh returned promptly,

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rallying instantly to the challenge. "We propose to claim everything that we have a right to claim, namely, the whole thing! Why shouldn't we?" he went on. "We are the original discoverers, and it is a law as old as the everlasting hills that first-finders are keepers."

He was going on to enlarge upon the point and bring illustrations to corroborate his position, but Markham interrupted by saying:

"Specify your claims. The law always compels a discoverer to do that. We are ready to grant you possession of all you have really brought to light, but you've got to tell, item for item, just what you claim to have found, and establish your right to it."

Starleigh was filled with amazement again to hear Markham express himself so fluently. But he was also beginning to feel that his own powers of invention and argument were fast getting into good working order once more, and to believe that he could safely rely on them to rescue him from the predicament he had feared he never could escape. It was in this mood that he responded to Markham's demand, as follows:

"You will excuse me, gentlemen, if I remark that I fail to see that you have any right to make such a demand as this. Surely as honorable business men you can not lay claim to any part of a

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business that was submitted to you in confidence, by a client."

"We don't!" Markham broke in. "I've told you, twice, that we grant that all you've found is yours. But we insist that you put in your claim to what you have found, and specify it in detail; and because time is precious, we want you to get down to business, without any more fooling or argument. We give you a fair chance to put in your claims, and make a record of 'em, and if you don't do it now, and do it quick, the time will come that you'll wish you had!"

Markham looked Starleigh straight in the eye as he said this, and there was that in his look which betokened that he meant every word he said. Starleigh was thinking fast.

"But I can't understand why you make this demand," he insisted.

"You'll find that out later," Markham responded. "And while you are waiting, identify your goods and put your mark on 'em, so that you'll know 'em when you see 'em again."

By this time Starleigh had turned the situation over in his mind sufficiently to feel that, after all, there could be no harm in doing what he was asked to do. From the evidence before him it was certain that these men were acquainted with a great many of the details of his plans. How

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final direction to Starleigh, as he settled back in his chair.

Starleigh began at the beginning once more, and as he proceeded laid claim to all the benefits that would accrue from carrying out their plans. These he noted as they went along; the real estate item, the side issues by way of transporting persons and property from one portion of the earth to another as they might be compelled to move, etc., etc., and finally wound up by insisting that they were entitled to all the profits that would come from selling short, just before the crash, on the stocks of all the financial and industrial concerns that would be ruined by the change they were going to make.

As he went over the list, he was busy thinking if there was anything he had omitted. It was this scouring for and skirmishing after stray items that might otherwise escape that led him to include the last item enumerated. But it did seem to him that with this one safely landed he had everything on shore. At the close of nearly two hours of continuous itemizing he finally made an end and said that was all.

"Much obliged!" said Markham. He had sat through the entire performance as though he were cut in marble. He had not even cleared his throat once, and when Starleigh made his most

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startling announcements Markham never moved a muscle. But now that the list was complete, he showed signs of life again, and his occasional alertness began to show itself once more. Presently he spoke:

"Now then," he said, "we know where we are, and can go ahead with what we've got up *our* sleeves."

Starleigh ground his teeth and said to himself: "Great God, what now?"

"You've made a very exhaustive list, Mr. Starleigh," Markham went on, "a very exhaustive list and one that includes several things that we omitted in our prospective inventory of your claims. You've evidently given the business an immense amount of thought, and you are entitled to great credit for what you've got out of it. But you have omitted some possibilities, have failed to discover some things that can be made valuable. What we propose to do is to avail ourselves of your oversight and to pick up and utilize what has escaped you."

Markham said this with the utmost deliberation, without the least show of feeling. It was simply a business proposition, and that was enough.

"But what is there left?" Starleigh demanded. "We've covered the whole ground." He was so

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confident on this point that he sneered as he made the remark.

"There is enough left to satisfy us," Markham replied. "We might emulate your example of a couple of hours ago, though, and intimate to you that it is none of your business what there is left!" He looked at the wall now, did Markham.

Starleigh held his own at this thrust, the more so as he could still find no flaw in his claims as he ran them over in his mind. He was just about to remark that they were welcome to anything they could find lying around loose, when Markham went on:

"You have made no claim to what will result from firing your guns the other way."

Starleigh roared! Was that all? Quick as a flash he responded:

"On the contrary, Mr. Markham, I distinctly told you that we should turn our guns right about, and fire them south when we had the earth turned enough. We shall have to do that, or the world will keep on and turn too far, from the momentum we have imparted to it,—just by the force of inertia, you know. Oh, you can't pick that up! We've got that solid as a rock. Read your record, Mr. Ketchum, and you'll see."

"That's all very true, as you say," Markham said. "We shall have no contest on that point,

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and shall make no claim on that basis. But you will surely acknowledge that you have never said, or even hinted about getting what would come from pointing your guns west and firing them that way."

Starleigh sat ready to laugh loud again, but with the utterance of the word *west* the color left his face. He could not think out quickly the results that would follow from firing west, but he could not help acknowledging that here was an item he had failed to note. He was on the point of saying so, when a way of escape occurred to him, and in a careless, off-hand way he remarked:

"That's very true. I didn't claim either what would come of firing guns straight up into the air, or down into the ground. There is no need of our doing so. What we claim is that the earth can be moved by the recoil of guns fired upon its surface. There is a point that can never be disputed. We are the original discoverers of this fact, and hence are entitled to all the benefits that accrue from our find. You have agreed, right here, that you could touch nothing that belonged to us, and having done so, you can make no claim to the right to what you have suggested. No one but ourselves can ever fire a single cannon for the purpose of moving the world, or is entitled to any benefit that would result from so doing. Our

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discovery was all-comprehensive, and our rewards are universal. Oh, no, my dear sir! You'll have to be more careful of your pick-ups than that. You'll have to examine our labels closer than that or you'll get your fingers burned."

Starleigh was himself again now, and good for anything that might come along. He had charged and won a victory, and in the spirit of conquest he sat ready for the next onset.

Markham let him breathe for a few minutes, and then he turned to his partner and said:

"Mr. Ketchum, will you please get the notes of our former meeting. There's something there that I want Mr. Starleigh to hear."

Ketchum stepped into a back office, and presently returned with a phonograph in his hands.

Starleigh stared as never before.

Ketchum set the instrument on the table and turning to Markham said:

"Plate number six?"

Markham nodded.

Ketchum selected the circular disk that bore that number, placed it in the machine, and threw the lever. There was the usual prelude of whirring, grinding and clicking. Then the instrument delivered what had been committed to its keeping, without fear or favor, and Starleigh sat there lis-

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tening to a reproduction of his own words, spoken by his own voice:

"When we were right astern," the instrument said, "she fired a thirteen-inch gun square from her broadside—"

Starleigh felt his hair rise. He tried to speak, but the words stuck in his throat. Meantime, the phonograph went steadily on with its work of repeating Starleigh's story of his discovery, just as he had related it to Ketchum and Markham on one of his previous visits to the office. It said:

"As it happened, I was looking straight at the vessel when the gun was fired, and I noticed that she careened away over to one side from the recoil, so much so that I said to a fellow who was standing by me: 'If they fired enough of those guns at once, and all on one side, they'd roll the old boat bottom side up, wouldn't they?' "

Starleigh knew the sentences by heart and he remembered what came next. He could not, he would not hear himself betrayed and condemned by words out of his own mouth. He leaped up, and reached towards the phonograph, his cane raised to smash it to smithereens.

But Ketchum was too quick for him. He had evidently anticipated Starleigh's action and so made ready for it. He rushed across Starleigh's track, and the collision was so fierce that the two men fell

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to the floor in a heap. As they lay there, puffing and struggling, the phonograph went on:

"And the man came back at me: 'They'd roll the world bottom side up if there were enough guns all on one side, and they fired 'em all together.'"

Markham leaned forward and touched the lever that stopped the instrument.

Ketchum arose and dusted his clothes.

Starleigh lay on the floor, breathless.

Then it was silent in the room. The noises of the street below came up faintly, and the clock ticked on the mantel. Starleigh became conscious of this by degrees. He closed his eyes and pressed his face harder to the floor, as if he would rest a moment. If he could only sleep! If it were all nothing but a dream! He moved his hand, and the feel of the carpet made him conscious that he was not in bed. Then the horrible truth was on him again, and once more he writhed in torture. He sprang to his feet in a fury, and burst out:

"And so you have planned robbing me from the very start, you cowardly thieves! You have laid for me from the very beginning; you have set traps for me, and put this damned senseless talking-box where it could pick up every word I said—"

"That will do! That will do!" Markham in-

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interrupted. "We have done nothing dishonorable or unfair. Sit down now, and take a square business look at a square business proposition. You'd better sit down," he reiterated, as Starleigh remained standing.

Starleigh returned to his chair, and Markham continued:

"I don't want to consume valuable time in refuting baseless charges," he said. "And yet it may be a saving of both words and scenes, in the end, for me to call your attention once more to the fact that we are dealing with you with perfect fairness, and that we have done so from the first. More than once you have called our attention to the fact that we are business men of the modern type. That is just what we are. But the business man of the modern type is neither a thief nor a scoundrel. On the contrary, he is a man of honor, and a man of his word. But he is a man who makes it his first business to see opportunities when they present themselves, and to avail himself of them to the best of his ability. That is what you have done, and it is what we have done."

He paused an instant and then proceeded:

"You have accused us of laying a trap for you in the shape of this phonograph, but I assure you we have done no such thing. All that we have done is to utilize a means of securing an accurate

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record of all that is said in this office, in a business way. Our experience has taught us that memory is one of the most treacherous faculties that the human mind possesses, and that all sorts of unpleasant and unprofitable complications are sure to arise whenever it is relied on for things that have been said in a business way. So we were obliged to keep a record of business conversations.

"For some time we relied on shorthand reporters; but we found after awhile that even these were not sufficiently accurate. They would sometimes transcribe their notes incorrectly, or write some word of similar spelling, but entirely different meaning, that changed the whole sense of what had really been said, till sometimes their record was practically of no value at all. Finally we got the idea of having an electric phonograph connected with our office, one that is automatic and always ready to do its work. Ketchum and I have electric buttons inserted in the floor, under our desks, for throwing the machine into gear, and whenever there is a conversation going on here that seems to either of us worthy of preservation, we press the button, and the phonograph does the rest."

Markham's face showed that in saying this he was simply making a business statement.

"But you ought to tell your clients about your

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contrivance, and so give them a chance to be on their guard," Starleigh interposed.

"We do about this as you did with us about your business, and as all great business men do. We tell what our interests require us to tell, but we never volunteer information."

Starleigh wanted to swear, but he knew of no words that would do the subject justice.

"And now you can realize the wisdom of our precaution," Markham went on. "You made a claim, a few minutes ago, that we had no right to use the principle of the recoil of a fired gun to move the body upon which the gun was standing at the time of the firing. You declared the discovery that such a force could be so utilized was entirely your own, and that, as its original discoverer, you alone were entitled to use it. This instrument has told you, in your own words, that . . . you are mistaken in your claim. The principle was in use on that ship. It has been in use ever since gunpowder was invented; and the man who answered you that day on the ship gave you the idea of turning the world about by the reaction caused by the discharge of heavy guns. You took the idea from him, and used it as far as you could. We take the idea from you, and shall use it as far as we can. We shall not use it as you do, but shall utilize it along the lines that we have a right to, to the best

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of our ability. The whole thing is strictly business, and as a business man of the modern type, you ought to have no kick coming."

Even while saying this, Markham's countenance changed not a line.

Starleigh rose from his chair, and, rushing across the room, began beating his head against the wall as if he would dash his brains out. Both Ketchum and Markham hurried to him and pulled him back into his chair. As he sat down he broke out:

"No! Let me alone! Let me smash my cursed brain for letting me be so damned silly as to brag! For it was my bragging that did me up. I wanted to make you think I was the smartest man God ever made, to paralyze you, and so I blurted out everything, and bragged like a schoolboy. Oh, I'd ask you to kill me if I was worth that much effort. But no! I'm fit for nothing but to suffer and be damned!"

He paused a minute, leaning partly on the two men as they half held him in his chair. At length he looked up, and said with some degree of calmness:

"When I was a boy I remember reading that Robert Burns once said that he had never yet given his entire confidence to any human being without afterwards regretting it. And he was right! He

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was right!" he added. "I was fool enough to tell you everything I knew. But may God never forgive me if I ever do the like again!"

"He was undoubtedly right," Markham responded, "and your resolution is commendable, from a business standpoint. However, what's done is done, and all we need to concern ourselves with here and now is things as they are. You can sit up alone now, can't you?"

Starleigh said he could, gathered himself together and sat up alone. Ketchum and Markham also sat down, each in his own place.

CHAPTER XV.

THE three men sat in silence for awhile, as though they could all afford to take breath before the next move. After a time Ketchum got up and put the phonograph away in the back office. Starleigh noticed how carefully he returned the plate he had used to its proper place. There was an air of positive exactness in every move he made. When he had the record all to rights, and the machine once more where it belonged, he returned to his desk. Everything then seemed to say that the regular order of business should now be resumed.

In the language of the ring, Starleigh was "groggy;" but he felt that he must keep up the fight to a finish, and he returned to the contest by saying:

"Well, what do you propose to do?"

Markham nodded to Ketchum, thereby indicating that he would now turn the case over to him, and that gentleman made reply, as follows:

"That's a sensible question," he said, "and one that we shall take pleasure in answering. In the first place, we propose to erect a plant of guns in Kansas similar to the one you are going to erect

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in Nebraska. They need water just as much in that state as in the one you are working, and while you are getting your charter in Nebraska we will get one in Kansas."

"But you are stealing our ideas again," Starleigh protested. "That would be utilizing what we have discovered in the way of carrying out our plans."

Markham cleared his throat with great vehemence. The sound he made was surely first cousin to a guffaw.

"Not at all! Not at all!" Ketchum replied. "Why, my dear sir, you certainly don't mean to insinuate that you and your partner have a monopoly on working a legislature to further the interests of an individual concern! Oh, come now!" he went on. "The fact is, you have become so in the habit of thinking of the whole world as yours, that you are ready to claim the exclusive right to everything that has ever been in it. But you are wrong. There will be several things, even under the new order that you propose to establish, that other people will have a claim on that you will have to reckon with before you can make them yours."

"Well, what else are you going to do?" Starleigh interrupted. "Let's get down to business, as you've been insisting."

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"As I said," Ketchum continued, "we are going to set up a plant of guns in Kansas similar to the one you establish in Nebraska, only we will fire our guns west instead of north."

"What do you expect to accomplish by that?" Starleigh asked. He felt that he could figure out what such bombarding would result in if he had time to do so, but he was certain these men had already determined that matter, and it was easier to let them tell it than to work it out himself. So he asked the question.

"Well," Ketchum replied, "there are quantities of things that will result. Of course, you'll see just as soon as your attention is called to it what the chief result will be. You are so familiar with the subject that it will all come to you the minute I mention it. The marvel is that you haven't thought of it before. When Mr. Markham first called my attention to it, I couldn't believe that it had escaped you. But he insisted that there was a possibility that it had; anyhow, that there could be no harm in our finding out, and that if you hadn't thought of it, there'd be a chance for us. So we tried it, and it seems he was right."

Starleigh quivered at the thought of his shortsightedness, and Ketchum went on:

"By firing our guns west we shall speed up the earth in its daily revolutions on its axis!"

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Starleigh saw the whole thing in an instant and broke out in an agony:

"Why, of course! Oh, my God! What a dribbling idiot, what a consummate ass I've been!" He raved about the room like a madman, and clutched the air with his hands. "Oh, fool! fool!" he repeated, again and again.

Ketchum let him rave for a time, watching him closely to make sure that he did himself no bodily harm in his frenzy. Neither of the brokers cared a straw for his mental agony. That was not their lookout. His suffering was the result of a strictly legal business transaction. They had done nothing unlawful or dishonorable in a business way, and so their skirts were clear. If people didn't want to get burned, they shouldn't play with fire. But if of their own free will they took a hand at a game, let them take their medicine like men if the luck went against them.

They did not say this in words, but their every action spoke these sentiments so that there was no mistaking them.

But while they felt it was none of their affair how much Starleigh suffered in his mind, they were exceedingly anxious not to have the interview end in a tragedy on their premises. For that would mean an inquest; and, besides that, a corpse is a horribly unpleasant thing in any event. So they

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watched their man closely, and were prepared for any emergency.

At length Starleigh sat down again, and Ketchum resumed:

"As I was saying," he went on to explain, "our firing will speed up the revolution of the earth on its axis. And the beauty of it is that we can continue the process till we attain any degree of rapidity of revolution we desire. Just how fast we shall ultimately make the old world whirl we haven't yet decided definitely. This is a fast age, though, and everything has to go on the double quick; so it's only fair that the earth should be up to date, and keep up with the procession."

Ketchum laughed quietly as he said this, and even Starleigh couldn't help smiling at the remark. Markham sat unmoved. It was only the business part of it all that appealed to him.

"The probabilities are," Ketchum continued, "that it is only by experiment that we can settle the point. Our idea is that it will be best to just double the speed we are going at now, to make two days and nights where we now have one. However, that can be settled later. We've got the power all in our own hands; and we can speed up to a certain point, and if we find we are going too fast, we can turn our guns around, as you propose to do with yours, and put on the brakes by firing

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east, till we get slowed down to where things can all be worked to the best advantage."

"But all that won't make any such changes as we shall make," Starleigh interrupted. He was calm again, and his thoughts ran readily along the old lines once more.

"It will make changes enough!" Ketchum returned. "Of course, you haven't thought 'em all out yet, for you haven't had time. I have no doubt you could do it though, if you once set your head to it," he added, as if that were a compliment Starleigh deserved, even if he couldn't enjoy it.

"Now see here;" and he stepped to the globe. "The faster the earth turns on its axis, the greater the centrifugal force will be at the equator, and the stronger the drawing-in power will be at the poles."

Starleigh got up and stood beside Ketchum before the globe. He couldn't help being interested, even if he felt that he was being robbed. Indeed, as the subject progressed, he became so absorbed in the possibilities that were opened up by this new idea that he had intervals of almost forgetting his woes.

"Now, as you will understand," Ketchum went on to say, "the greater the centrifugal force at the equator, the more the ocean will bulge out on that

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part of the earth's surface. The pressure is less at the poles, at the same time, and for that reason too the water will pile up under the equator."

"I know! I know!" Starleigh put in. "Of course it will!" He was impatient to have Ketchum proceed, his own thoughts being already far and away ahead of anything that had yet been revealed.

"Now that extra raising of the water at the equator and lowering it as you go towards the poles is going to change the amount of dry land on the surface of the earth, and make it entirely different from what it would be if the firing were done only as you propose to do it. And this change of ours cuts both ways. We shall submerge and so utterly destroy great areas that your plan would leave untouched; and we shall also uncover millions of acres that your scheme would leave under water. In a word, we shall improve your opportunities of profit at both ends of the line. We shall destroy untold quantities of valuable stuff that will have to be replaced—cities, railroads, and everything that goes along with them—and we shall at the same time make ready for market a vast amount of stuff that you would never get at."

Starleigh stood looking at the globe while this was said, his hands behind him, and his brows

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knitted. He put out his hand and turned the great ball over as he studied the new plan.

"You've got this painted up to show how things will be when we've both got in our work, haven't you?" he asked.

"Sure!" Ketchum replied. "Why not? You had yours your way, and we'll have ours our way."

"Well, what's to hinder our turning our guns and firing them west part of the time?" Starleigh demanded. "We can have them hung on a swivel and fire 'em any way we please. Our original proposition was to fire 'em two ways, and if our claim is good for two, why not for three, or four, or a dozen?" he insisted.

"Too late to make that claim now!" Markham broke in. "You said, when you finished up awhile ago, that you'd got your pile all in. We gave you every chance in the world to take everything you could lay hands on while you were at it. But when you acknowledged that you'd put your mark on everything that you could think of, it was certainly our right to take the leavings. Firing west was a leaving. We have taken it, and we shall hold it, and everything that comes out of it. If you want to know just what you said about it, we'll have the phonograph repeat it for you."

"Keep the cursed thing where it is," Starleigh retorted. "My memory may be treacherous in

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spots, but there's enough of it that's reliable to let me know very definitely what you trapped me into saying."

"Never mind about that," Markham replied. "It is not a question of how you happened to say what you did, but of what you really did say. That's a fundamental proposition in all strictly business transactions. A man is held responsible for his words, just as he ought to be. It's so in all the courts, and it's right. If people were allowed to take back what they have promised, in a business way, the whole business world would be in a state of anarchy inside of twenty-four hours. We are simply standing on our rights according to good business usage the world over. A business man must stand by his word. That's business honor, and anything else is the baby act. You said your say. We've got a record of your words, a witness whose testimony will stand in any court, and one that can't be bribed, or spirited away while the case is continued. That much is settled. Now let's go ahead with the rest of what there is to be done."

Starleigh sat down, and once more Ketchum proceeded:

"And so we shall demand our right to all the profit on all these extras. We shall organize a stock company to exploit the business, and shall em-

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ploy the best legal talent the world affords to take care of our interests before all the courts. We shall have a small army of private detectives in citizens' clothes constantly on the ground, and ready to assert our rights whenever they are trespassed upon. We shall not interfere with you so long as you stay on your side of the fence, so long as you stay where you belong. But we give you fair warning that you mustn't trespass on our preserves. We know how far your changes will extend, and where yours leave off, ours begin. Meantime, we'll shove our stock onto the market at the same time yours goes on, and pray the Lord the dear people may stay with us long enough to absorb both lots."

"I understand, then," Starleigh interposed, "that you don't intend going back on underwriting our stock."

"Surely not," Ketchum replied. "To do that would be to go back on our word. That is what we never have done yet, and what we never proposed to do. Our sense of business honor would forever preclude the possibility of our doing a thing of that sort."

Starleigh sat and thought for a long time; at length he said:

"It's going to make a hell of a lot of trouble and expense for us both, this duplicating of plants

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and clashing on border lines and all that sort of thing. We might as well count on giving about two-thirds of the whole thing to the lawyers, right from the start!"

Ketchum winked at Markham. Things were moving the right way. Neither said a word, though. Forces more powerful than words were working on Starleigh as he sat there thinking.

After awhile Starleigh asked:

"What do you men want? That we should buy you out?"

"Oh, no!" Ketchum replied. "We have no desire to sell. We've got a good thing just as it is; and if you can stand the pressure of a fight for what's your own, we can stand the pressure of a fight for what is our own. We give you fair warning, that's all."

For a long time Starleigh was silent again. Presently he said:

"Would you entertain a proposition to effect a merger, under the circumstances?"

Markham made a sound somewhere in his throat that seemed to say, "At last!" But he looked at the wall only, and his face was utterly devoid of expression.

"Well, we might consider it, if you cared to do so," Ketchum replied. "As you have said, it would save a tremendous bill of expense if we

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could effect a consolidation. Besides that, to do so would be in harmony with modern business methods. We should cheapen production, lessen running expenses, and so increase profits accordingly."

"There's only one thing against it," Starleigh almost groaned.

"What's that?" Markham asked.

"Great God! Don't you see?" Starleigh rejoined, as he arose and began to pace the room again. "If you fellows come into the game, Goldsby and I shall have to divide, and so we shan't own it all! That's what cuts like vitriol in one's eyes! We thought we were going to own the earth and everything there was in it, to make it ours from pole to pole, and have a cinch on the whole thing, so that not a soul in the whole outfit could even breathe without our getting a rake-off! And now, if we make a combine, we've got to divide! We've got to divide!"

He moaned as he walked, and there were tears in his eyes.

"But we shall add enough to the business to bring up your receipts so that they'll be as large as they would have been if you'd only carried out your plan," Ketchum argued. "There'll be enough to go around. We shall all have enough."

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Starleigh turned like a beast at bay, and standing before Ketchum, he roared:

"Enough? Great God, man! Don't you realize that no human being ever can have enough till he has got everything there is to be had? It is all, all and the rest of it, if there is anything left out on the first round,—that's the only thing that can ever really satisfy a human soul! I've thought ten thousand times that that's the only thing that makes God Almighty really happy,—the fact that he knows he's the whole thing!"

He paused an instant, trembling from head to foot, and the tears streaming down his cheeks. His hair was disheveled, and his eyes were blood-shot. Then he continued, between his sobs:

"When I first got this idea, I thought I could do the whole thing alone and be the whole push myself. And so long as I felt that way about it I was happy. God, but I was happy!" he cried out with a sort of hysterical laugh. "But I found that the scheme was too big for me to handle alone, and though it broke my heart to do it, yet I took Goldsby in and made up my mind to be satisfied with half. But it was no good. Half may be better than none for some folks, but I've found out that it's all or none for me."

"Hasn't Goldsby been square?" Markham

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asked, as Starleigh paused an instant in his ravings.

"Square as a brick!" Starleigh hastened to reply. "It wasn't that. But it was having to divide! To divide! I had to share up! To take somebody else into the place that can never be made big enough to hold more than one! That's what knifed me! I stood it, though, because Goldsby is such an awfully good fellow. But now to have to share in with you men—fellows that we don't know a thing about——"

"Haven't we proved to you that we are strictly honorable business men?" Ketchum asked.

"Oh, you're honorable enough, and you're business on the ground floor," Starleigh replied. "It isn't that. You're as good as anybody. Good as I am, or as Goldsby is. But you are men. You are somebody else besides ourselves, and we've got to share up with you. You can have a say about things, and we've got to consult you about what we do. That's what grinds. We can't do as we damn please, absolutely independent. That's what makes hell of what I thought was going to be heaven."

Starleigh dropped into his chair again, and breathed heavily.

"Well, what about it?" Markham asked presently. "Shall we make the merger, or shall we

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fight? That's the question before the house, and it's long past lunch time. Say yes or no, and let's have the matter settled." And he started to rise.

Starleigh choked, then rallied and pleaded:

"Let me see Goldsby before I decide. That's fair. He is my partner, and has a right to be consulted. Don't crowd us too hard. Let me see Goldsby."

"All right," Markham returned. "We've no desire to take any undue advantage. We'll give you till ten to-morrow to make answer."

Having said which, Markham left the room as before. Ketchum said "All right," and went out. Starleigh staggered to the elevator, and thence into the street, where he hailed a cab and gave direction to be driven to the hotel.

CHAPTER XVI.

AS Starleigh rode through the crowded streets he looked out at the multitudes that were everywhere surging about, rushing here and there, each bent on his own mission, and oblivious, if not utterly careless of everything and everybody else. Finally he began to muse aloud:

"Poor devils!" he said. "There they go tearing along like mad, as if the whole world and all its affairs depended on them. And yet, how much do they amount to, any and all of 'em? Much as I do," he said, answering his own question. "Oh, it's all a sham!" he went on. "The game isn't worth the candle, and I don't care whether the candle is a penny dip or would reach from here to the moon. It's all the same in the long run. We're all alike. All is the only thing that can satisfy anybody, anywhere, at any time. And we can't any of us get it all, so we're all miserable. And yet we keep a-hustling. What a pity God ever saved Noah alive, and didn't drown the whole damned outfit while He was about it. It would have been better that way."

It was in this mood that Starleigh arrived at the hotel. He alighted from the cab and walked

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through the corridor in a brusque, business-like way. There was nothing in his face or manner that indicated the torment within him. He bought a handful of cigars at the stand, and joked with the girl in charge as she handed him out his favorite brand. Then he went upstairs.

He found Goldsby waiting for him in their rooms, and in no happy frame of mind at the long delay in his coming. He had been playing solitaire, to while away the time, but had quit it in disgust. He hadn't won a single game the whole morning, and in his present anxious state of mind his superstition got the better of him, and he took his ill luck as an omen that everything was going against them. He finally threw the cards on the floor, and they lay there scattered about. Starleigh walked over them as he came in.

Goldsby spoke first:

"I knew it!" he broke out, as he saw Starleigh's face. "I felt it all in my bones when I saw that cursed letter last night. I swear, it's wonderful how such things come to a fellow. If that envelope had come straight out of hell I shouldn't have smelled sulphur any stronger than I did when I picked it up. Don't tell me there isn't a devil going about to get it into you, for I know better! What did they do to you?" he asked when he had come to the end of his tirade.

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"Everything!" Starleigh replied, as he sank into the great chair. He was ghastly pale, and beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. "Open up some windows here," he directed; "I feel as if I were smothered."

Goldsby raised a couple of sashes and then came and stood before Starleigh, expectant.

"Well, let's have it," he said. "Give it to me straight, and let's see the bottom the first round. What is it?"

"They want to make a merger with us!" Starleigh broke out. He was so badly mixed up that he had no power to relate the events that had just taken place in consecutive order, so he blurted out the thing that was uppermost in his mind, that which hurt him worst.

"A merger?" Goldsby yelled. "Why, for God's sake, what have they got to merge? They aren't in it at all, only as brokers; and all they can ask for is their percentage! What's eatin' 'em? Are they trying to hog the whole game? I swear, I knew all the time that that Markham was a hog. He's got all the marks."

"Don't say a word about him," Starleigh broke in. "He's the most wonderful man God ever made."

"O-ho!" Goldsby returned with a sneer. "So he's roped you with the rest, has he? Made you

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bow down and worship him with all the rest. He does you up till you look as forsaken as a last year's bird's nest, and still you stick to him. You are worse than Job when he said: 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.' "

"I don't give a damn for him!" Starleigh hurled back. "All I say is that he's a marvel. He's got the best business head on him that there is in the world to-day, and I know it."

"Makes a man modest to be licked to a finish, don't it?" Goldsby returned.

"I don't know nor care what it does," said Starleigh. "All I know is that I stand ready to bet all I've got in this world against that cigar stub you've got in your mouth that when you hear the whole story you'll feel as I do about Markham. He's a business genius and a business giant combined, and that's a merger that beats anything else on top of sod."

"Well, let's hear the story," Goldsby interrupted. "There'll be time enough to eulogize Markham after we have got the wreck he has made cleared away, that is, if there's anything left to clear away," he added despondently.

By this time Starleigh was sufficiently recovered to talk connectedly, and he proceeded to relate what had happened that morning at the office of Ketchum and Markham. Goldsby heard him

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sulkily at first, but as the narration proceeded his interest grew and his face lighted up till after awhile he looked positively happy. When Starleigh told of the phonograph episode, Goldsby laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, and slapped his legs again and again with resounding whacks.

"I swear, old man, that's the best I ever heard in my life. Made you sit there and eat your own words, fed to you out of a brass trumpet! You couldn't call the thing a liar for you loaded it yourself! Oh, say, but that's great! Beats the day of judgment all hollow! All Saint Peter pretends to have is a written record that he made himself, and a good bluffer could knock a thing of that kind out, and not half try; but to have your own words, spoken in your own voice, fired back at you! Oh, that's a corker!"

"I told you he was the most wonderful man in the world," Starleigh declared.

"Go ahead with the story," said Goldsby. "You can't beat that, though." And he took a good-by laugh at the first part of Starleigh's narrative.

The star event of the occasion came, however, when Starleigh made known the plan of the brokers to set up a rival plant of guns in Kansas and fire them west. Goldsby made the same protest

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about this that Starleigh had made when the purpose was first broached, but Starleigh soon showed him that their claim to a monopoly of the force of gun-kicks to move the earth wouldn't hold, and that they could be compelled to acknowledge the right of their rivals to go ahead, as they had declared they were going to do. This brought them face to face with the proposal of Ketchum and Markham in the matter of merging their interests, and to that proposition they addressed themselves. Starleigh had another flood of regrets about not being able to have everything all to themselves, but when the passion was past he got into a more practical frame of mind, and the two men began seriously to consider what they had best do under the circumstances.

As they talked the matter over, Goldsby became inspired with admiration for the new order proposed, and he was very shortly stating reasons by the quantity why they should accede to the formation of the merger.

"Why, old man," he protested, "it's a god-send. Great heavens! With this on top of our scheme, we've got everything by the back of the neck a thousand times tighter than as if we'd only done our way."

"But we can't have it all!" Starleigh exclaimed.

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"All be damned!" Goldsby broke in. "Don't be a consummate ass, my dear boy. There'll be enough for four, and don't you ever forget it. And after all, about so much is all anybody can ever get away with. We'll have all we can manage, all of us, and I shouldn't wonder if we'd all wish there was less rather than more of it before we get through."

Goldsby urged his position so well that Starleigh finally came over to his side, and so it was settled that they would consent to the merger, and that Starleigh should go and fix the matter up the next morning. This disposed of, the two men took a drink to the success of the new enterprise, and then began to speculate regarding its future.

As they talked, the subject grew, and greater and greater possibilities opened up to them. Goldsby began to wonder how many of these Ketchum and Markham had thought of, and whether it would not be possible for them (Starleigh and Goldsby) to think up and lay claim to some things that the brokers had let get away from them. Starleigh insisted, however, that it was useless to waste time on speculations of this sort, as there was no such thing as anything ever getting away from Markham once he got after it. Goldsby yielded the point, and yet, out of the sheer charm that the proposed new order of

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things had for him, he kept on speculating as to what would result from speeding up the world in its daily revolution. Somehow the subject had a wonderful attraction for him and he couldn't keep away from it.

"Why, it'll be a godsend to humanity, as well as to us," he declared, as he continued to talk. "You're right, Starleigh, Markham is a prodigy. He's hit on the greatest thing in modern times. I wonder if he really knows how great a thing he's got onto?"

Starleigh assured him again that there could be no doubt on that point, but still Goldsby went on:

"Just think of the things this doubling up the days in a year will do," he said. "Money will draw interest twice as fast, for thirty days will come around twice as quick as they do now. Then, people will have to eat four meals every twenty-four hours under that arrangement, where they eat only three now."

"How's that?" Starleigh questioned.

"Why, easy enough," Goldsby replied. "They'll have breakfast every time they get up and supper before they go to bed. They get up twice and go to bed twice every twenty-four hours (such hours as we have now) so that means four meals where we get in only three at present. That

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means an increase in the consumption of food of thirty-three per cent over what we're eating now. And that's what I call genius, to bring about a thing like that."

"The fact is," he went on, "that the one great problem of this age is how to increase consumption,—to find a market for what we can turn out. That's what all this howl about 'the open door' in China amounts to. We've got to find a place to dump our stuff or we're done up. Under the old order of things, the man who could make two blades of grass grow where but one grew before was counted a public benefactor. But that don't go now. The question now before the houses of all the nations of the earth is how to use up and get rid of the extra blades of grass that everybody is growing these days. Markham's plan makes a place for a third more than we are now getting rid of in the way of food, and he's entitled to the thanks of the civilized world for the idea."

Starleigh had settled back in his chair and was slowly smoking his cigar. The experiences of the morning had worn him to the bone, and now that the main issue was determined upon he was glad to take a little rest. He ordered up a lunch, and while it was being made ready Goldsby continued:

"Oh, this is a picnic! Why, old man, the fun that will come from seeing this old world do two

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days in one will be worth the cost of sharing up with somebody else. Just think of it!" he went on. "People will have to go to bed and get up twice as often as before and that'll make 'em wear out their clothes twice as fast, taking 'em off and putting 'em on again. Why, just take the matter of extra wear and tear of shoe strings for the whole world over, and there's a fortune just in the gain on that one little item."

He stopped and thought about it for a minute, and then went ahead again:

"Look at the saving, too, that will come in the way of dinner pails, and think what that means. As things are now, the dinner pail is the disorganizer of society. No man has any business ever to eat a meal of victuals alone. The Bible says it isn't good for a man to be alone, and it's right. But if a man ever is alone it's when he's eating a cold dinner out of a dinner pail. The practice is thoroughly unwholesome, and contrary to Scripture, and the man is a great moral reformer who can wipe it out of existence. Markham's plan will do just that. For if the daylight he gives the world only averages six hours at a time, everybody can take all their meals at home, and there you are."

Starleigh's cigar was burning low, and he had become reconciled to the inevitable to such a de-

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gree that his imagination could begin to work once more, so presently he took up the thread of Goldsby's thought and went on:

"Yes, and four hours will make a day's work," he said, "and that will tickle the working contingent most to death."

"They'll have to go back and forth, to and from their work, twice as often as before, and that will wear out twice as many shoes," Goldsby suggested.

"And then sermons can only be half as long, and lectures will have to be cut in the same way, and what a blessing to suffering humanity both those things will be!" said Starleigh.

"After-dinner speeches and plays ditto," Goldsby put in.

"Sure," Starleigh assented. "It'll make everything come right down to a business basis. That'll be all there'll be time for, and that's right. As a matter of fact, business is all there is in this world anyhow, and everything that puts it on its feet is worth while."

"When a fellow goes to see his girl," Goldsby went on, "he'll tell her, right from the shoulder, just what he wants. No time for monkey business. Evening's short, and got to get home and get to bed to be ready for the next day that's coming a-rushing."

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Starleigh laughed and continued the battledoor and shuttlecock:

"Lawyers will have to cut their speeches in two," he said.

"Doctors will have to make twice as many visits," Goldsby responded.

"Recitations in school can't be more'n half as long," Starleigh declared.

"Teachers won't have to be bothered with only one recess a day," said Goldsby.

"The active principle of pills will have to be doubled," Starleigh affirmed, "since they'll have only half as much time to get in their work."

"That'll do. I surrender," Goldsby said. "But honestly," he went on, "this is a great find of Markham's. To be sure, he virtually stole the main idea from you, but he's surely worked it out in a way that will supplement our business to perfection. Get back to headquarters to-morrow and close up the deal for a merger. There'll be enough in it for us all, and these men have won a right to their share. Fix it up with 'em, get your stuff ready at this end of the line, and I'll head for Nebraska."

"All right," said Starleigh. "It came a little hard to make up my mind to it at first, but I can see now that it's for the best. This arrangement will make an outfit complete in itself, a thing that

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we lacked before. We had to go outside for brokers and underwriters then, but now we've got all the machinery in our own hands. That'll make it all the easier to handle, and I'm sure it'll be the best thing in the long run."

The waiter came in, and the two men sat down to lunch.

CHAPTER XVII.

AND thus it was that the great merger was brought about. Starleigh arranged the details with Ketchum and Markham the next day, and they mutually congratulated each other on the immense saving which the deal would effect.

Under the new order of things, as they figured it, there would be only one legislature to buy up. That would not only save money, but it would bring relief from great nervous strain, would eliminate the necessity of bringing about numberless drunks, and divide by two the danger of getting into trouble with investigating committees, which were making themselves more and more disagreeable every year, meddling with what used to be considered nobody's business.

Then there was a clear saving of at least five hundred millions that came from dropping out the Kansas plant. It was agreed that the Nebraska outfit could do all the work required. When the pole had been properly located and the earth

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steadied down to a stable equilibrium again after its oscillating experience, then the guns could be turned west and let go again. Markham suggested that it would be well to allow some time to elapse between the two firings. His idea was to keep the second move dark till people got a little used to the first one, and had begun to invest lively under the new order, supposing it to be permanent. That would enable the combine to dispose of a lot of stuff, at good prices, that would be worthless just as soon as the world was speeded up. He said that if what they sold was good when they delivered it, that was enough. They couldn't be held responsible for what happened after they let go. To expect them to do so would be contrary to the business ways of the world. Let the buyer look out for himself.

It was further arranged that the brokers should underwrite five hundred millions of stock in the Experimental Sky Bombarding Company, and advance money enough on it to go ahead with the construction of the plant in Cherry County just as soon as Goldsby could get the charter from the Nebraska legislature. With affairs thus rounded up and in shipshape, Starleigh went abroad for a few weeks' rest and Goldsby began to exploit his plans to secure the charter.

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It was early winter when Goldsby appeared in Lincoln, and the weather was perfection itself. The Indian Summer days that are all too few in the eastern states linger and take time in Nebraska. The air on such days is of a quality that can be breathed in no other locality in all the world, and the sunshine surpasses that of Italy at its best. At this season of the year clouds are rare and the face of the sky is one solid dome of blue,—not a pale and washed-out blue, but a color that has life and just enough of warmth in it to make one feel comfortable, through and through.

Goldsby noted all these items in the account, and how conducive to the restoration to health of a chronic bronchial diseased victim such an environment would be. The game was playing with him, and even the weather-man had set things up for him just as he wanted them. He had the best excuse in the world for being where he was, and his real business was so deftly hidden that it would never be suspected. He had begun to cough as soon as he headed for the West, and by the time he reached Omaha he had attained all the cleverness in the subterfuge which he had been master of a few weeks before. When he asked for rooms at the Lincoln Hotel, he had such a violent attack of his malady that the clerk hesitated about taking him into the house. But when Goldsby

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asked for a suite of rooms on the parlor floor, the best he had, the suave young man at the desk put his doubts behind him and located the gentleman in parlors A and B, first floor front, and nearest the dining-room.

Goldsby found himself very comfortably conditioned in his new quarters. One excellent thing about his location in the hostelry was, that from the balcony in front of his rooms he could command a sweeping view of the hotel lobby which is the scene of the beginnings of the most of the intrigues that pertain to Nebraska politics. Seated half behind a pillar which was situated just back of the balustrade that surrounded the lobby on the floor he occupied, he could look down upon the statesmen of that rural state as they chatted together below. It was not his ambition to be the observed of all observers, but rather to be the observer of all the observed. To be the former was to have obtained fame; to be the latter was business, and that was Goldsby.

He had purposely reached the capital a few days before the legislature assembled, knowing that it was every way to his advantage to be early on the ground. He found that a few members of the advance guard were already in evidence and making ready for business. The suite next to his was occupied by a leading school book concern,

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then came the apartments of a leading railroad representative, and further down the corridor there were located the headquarters of other parties who had fish to fry. He congratulated himself that his rooms were at the head of the row, counting from the dining room, which is the most efficient factor in such cases, barring the bar. He found later on that he was nearest the bar also.

In the course of a few days the members began drifting in, and most of them showed up in the lobby of the Lincoln, as Goldsby had surmised they would. Few of them were forehanded enough to have rooms at the hotel, but they all came there to loaf. That was Goldsby's opportunity. It is small odds to a successful lobbyist where a member eats and sleeps. His loafing place is where the work is done.

For some days Goldsby kept his watch, looking for Goodpasture, but he came not. That is, he didn't show up in the lobby of the Lincoln Hotel. Goldsby had felt sure he would do so, and because he couldn't be on guard all the time, he tipped one of the bell-boys, who faithfully agreed to report at once the presence on the office floor of a gentleman whose appearance Goldsby described to the lad with great minuteness. But the days went by, and neither from his own observations nor from the reports of his deputy could he get

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any trace of the man he was there to see. He grew anxious and wondered if anything had happened to his victim. Could it be possible that he had finally succumbed to that cursed cough that shook him like an ague? Had sickness and death taken a hand against them, now that they were on the very verge of getting everything they wanted? Thoughts like these lodged with Goldsby as the days and nights went by, and paid not a cent for their housing.

Finally Goldsby began to walk the streets in search of the desired man. He wanted to get at him early, and the question was how to do it. Every day he would walk out once or twice, taking different routes each time so as not to attract attention. As often as he dared to, he strolled by the post office, thinking that possibly from his always having gone to the office for his mail, Goodpasture would show up in that locality. Once or twice he imagined he saw his man, but on coming nearer he found he was mistaken.

The session opened, and still the vision tarried. When the *Journal* came out the next morning, Goldsby ran over the list of the members who had answered to their names, and Goodpasture's was in its place all right and regular. He was there then. That much was certain. The rest would come in time.

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It was nearly a week before Goldsby got affairs into such shape that he felt warranted in going ahead. In matters of this sort, haste makes waste, and a single misstep may prove fatal. His long experience as a lobbyist had taught him this, and he took plenty of time for his moves, though he was really in a great hurry for their advancement. He made himself solid with a couple of detectives and they soon located Goodpasture for him and gave him data as to the representative's whereabouts and habits at the capital, so far as they were formed. With this knowledge in hand, Goldsby began to advance upon the citadel.

He had learned where Goodpasture boarded, at a modest house far out on O Street, and also that he quite regularly walked back and forth between his lodgings and the capitol. So one afternoon, about the hour of Goodpasture's going to supper, Goldsby ordered out the finest livery rig that the city afforded, and started for a drive. He was an excellent horseman and handled the lines with both show and dexterity. He took a few turns around the block and then turned into P Street. His purpose was to go out on this street and come back on O, thus meeting Goodpasture as he was on his way to supper. The sun was just setting, the evening was perfect, and the team was all one could wish. Goldsby almost

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forgot to cough as he went spinning through the crisp air. He was speeding along O Street on the return trip at a spanking pace, his eye glancing quickly from team to sidewalk and back again as he drove, when suddenly he saw his man about a block away and coming towards him.

Then Goldsby paid strict attention to his team. He looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, but straight at the horses, which seemed to absorb all his thoughts. He held the reins high and tilted his head a little to one side. He felt sure that the clatter of the horses' hoofs and the stunning pace he was holding would make Goodpasture look his way. And so they did.

Then just at the instant Goldsby felt certain he was immediately opposite his man, he carelessly glanced toward the walk and looked straight into Goodpasture's eyes.

Goldsby's brows went up with such a start of surprise as almost to knock his silk hat onto the back of his head.

"Whoa!" he shouted sharply to the horses, leaning far back and lifting his hands high, "Whoa!"

But in spite of his efforts to make a quick stop he ran nearly half a block beyond Goodpasture, who had stopped, turned, and was now standing on the curbstone.



"He wants to get a bill through the legislature." Page 264.

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Goldsby made a graceful turn to right about, cutting a perfect semicircle in the wide street, and showily jogged back to where Goodpasture was waiting for him. As he was coming up he coughed severely, but the paroxysm was past before the two men met.

"Bless my soul, old man!" Goldsby shouted cheerily as he reached out his whip-hand and shook heartily with Goodpasture. "It's you as sure as eggs is eggs! I wasn't quite certain the first glance I got at you, for these steppers are feeling their oats this evening, and were giving me about all I wanted to do when I met you. Curious I happened to see you just then. Hadn't looked up before since I left the hotel. Guess there must have been a mutual attraction." And he laughed till he coughed.

"I'm very glad to see you," Goodpasture responded.

"When did you come up?" Goldsby asked.

"I've been here something more than a week," Goodpasture replied.

"So?" said Goldsby, as his brow went away up again in surprise. "Madam with you?"

"Oh, no," Goodpasture returned. "She had to stay at home and look after the stuff. 'They also serve who only stand and wait,' " he added.

"Great luck a man is in, these days, if he has

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a wife that's willing to stand and wait," Goldsby remarked. "But you're that happy individual. Going to be in town long?" he asked.

"Probably through the winter," Goodpasture replied.

"Good!" said Goldsby with great enthusiasm. "That'll give us another chance to see something of each other. Hope you aren't going to be so busy that we can't be together off and on. I'm just loafing here, you know, killing time and trying to get rid of this cursed cough. How's yours coming on?"

"Oh, so-so," Goodpasture answered. "It's worse at some times than at others, but I think I'm getting the better of it on the whole."

"Which way you going?" Goldsby asked.

"Up this street a few blocks," Goodpasture replied. "I'm boarding up there for the present. It gives me quite a walk every day, back and forth, for I thought it would be best for my health not to keep myself too closely confined while I am here."

"It's none of my business," Goldsby remarked, "but what are you up to, staying in this town so long and away from your family at this time of year? Aren't going back to teaching, are you?"

He almost wished he hadn't asked the question,

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especially as Goodpasture paused an instant before answering it. He set the whip in the socket as he waited for a reply.

"Why, I'm in the legislature," Goodpasture replied, with the least touch of a drawl in his voice.

"Oh, sure!" Goldsby broke in. "What an idiot I am to ask such a question. It all comes back to me now. But you see you took me so by surprise. Last man in the world I thought of seeing here, though I really ought to have remembered that you were to be here this winter. Get in, and I'll take you to your stopping place," he added, at the same time cramping the carriage so that Goodpasture could do as he was invited.

Goodpasture went round to the other side of the vehicle, climbed in, and was whirled up the street in royal fashion.

"Good team," the representative remarked, leaning his head forward to keep his hat from being blown off.

"Fine!" Goldsby responded. "I only got onto 'em to-day, but I'll make the most of 'em from now on. Good stepper, that off one!" And he nodded towards the horse.

"Second house from the next corner, on the left hand side," Goodpasture directed.

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"All right," Goldsby returned. "Got time to take a little spin before you go in, haven't you, the evening is so everlastingly fine?"

Goodpasture said he could spare a few minutes, and they kept on up the street. As they rode, Goldsby related how as soon as he reached the East his cough had begun to grow worse, and that his doctor had insisted that he return to Nebraska for the winter.

"So I pulled out for fair weather," he went on to say, "and I've found it, too, for I swear there is no such air as this to breathe in all God's world. But a fellow can't live on air alone, even if he has to have a special brand of the article to keep alive at all. I hated like the devil to come out here for all winter, where I didn't know a soul. But now that I've found you here it'll make quite a let-up. They won't work you up at the capitol so hard but that you'll have plenty of time to visit, and if things go right we'll put in some days together that will be worth while. Lord, but I'm glad to have you where I can get at you, for I got stacks of pleasure out of you and your family when I was at your house."

And so they chatted for half an hour, when they pulled up at Goodpasture's boarding house and wished each other good evening. As Goldsby

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drove slowly back to his hotel he went over the whole interview and concluded that it was a success.

Goodpasture seemed to his fellow-boarders unusually thoughtful as he ate his supper that night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AS a skillful angler plays a fish when once he has it hooked, even so Goldsby took his time with Goodpasture. The evening of their ride he had invited the representative to come and dine with him and the invitation had been accepted. The dinner had passed off uneventfully, and it was followed by an evening of quiet and delightful intercourse in Goldsby's room. He had the latest books and magazines on his table and the talk was literary to a degree. There was not a single blank or awkward moment the whole evening through, and it was late when the two men bade each other an apparently regretful good night.

"Good as wheat in the bin," Goldsby remarked to himself when his guest was gone and the door was shut. He's ours, body and boots, and all we have to do is to take our time to get out of him everything we want."

"I wonder what he's after?" Goodpasture reflected as he walked home in the moonlight.

Things ran along in this way for a couple of weeks or so, when Goldsby decided that it was

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about time to begin to reel in. He had taken Goodpasture to the theater two or three times, and they had had frequent rides together, the weather holding fine. Goldsby studied the situation and then made his first move towards business. By dint of skillful questioning he learned of an afternoon when Goodpasture would not be busy in the house, and he at once planned for a long drive into the country with him at that time.

"Let's get out where there's elbow room," he had said when he proposed the excursion.

The day was perfect, the team was fresh and the roads were level and good. There are no driveways in all the world pleasanter to travel over than Nebraska roads when they are at their best. There is an elasticity in the native soil when used as a roadway that is unequalled anywhere; and even a drive of twenty-five to fifty miles is a pleasure and not a task when the road is in perfect condition.

The two men made a long detour to the northwest of the city that afternoon. It was most fortunate that Goodpasture smoked, and they both did full justice to Goldsby's excellent cigars as they rode. After they had wheeled about and were headed for the city again, Goldsby broke out:

"Oh, by the way (I pretty nearly forgot it,

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there are so many more interesting things to talk about. I ain't worth a cuss for business, especially when I'm in the company of a man who cares more for literature and the real things of life than he does for dollars and cents); but I had a letter from a friend of mine in the East to-day, and he wants to know if I can't help him out a little, now I'm out here, on a matter of business I've never had any experience with. He wants to get a bill through the legislature for a scheme he's got that he thinks will be a great blessing to the state if he can get it chartered and onto its feet."

Goodpasture stole a careful glance at his companion, only to find that he was looking steadfastly at the team. Both the men had fits of coughing shortly after, and it was several minutes before the conversation was resumed. Then Goldsby said:

"As I was saying, the whole thing is so foreign to my nature and inclinations that I had a notion to write him by return mail that I couldn't do a thing for him. My experience is that a man better not monkey with what he doesn't know anything about. But when I sat down to write him, it popped into my head that maybe you could help me out in the business, being on the inside as you are, and knowing about these things as you

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do. So I thought I wouldn't give him the clear stand-off till I'd talked with you. The man is an old friend of mine, and one of the squarest, most honorable men I ever knew in my life, and I don't want to turn him down unless I have to."

"What's his scheme?" Goodpasture inquired, coming so quickly to the point that Goldsby was a trifle taken back by his directness.

"Well, I don't know as I quite comprehend it all," Goldsby replied. "I've got his letter here in my pocket and if you'll drive awhile I'll read it to you. Let 'em walk for awhile," he added, as he transferred the lines to Goodpasture.

Then he drew from his pocket the letter in question and read as follows:

"MY DEAR GOLDSBY:

" 'You will doubtless be surprised at getting a letter from me, but wait till I tell you, and then you'll know all about it.'

"There needs no ghost come from the grave to tell us that, my lord," Goldsby interlarded, and then read on:

" 'I have just learned, by the merest accident, that you are spending the winter in Lincoln, Nebraska. It's that cursed cough, I suppose, bad 'cess to it. May you get finally rid of it this trip,—have it all blown out of you by those western

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zephyrs that we hear so much about. I'm hoping the best for you.

" 'I'm wondering how you're putting in the time.'

" If he could see us now, he'd know what I'm doing with some of it, and he'd have no cause to feel bad about it either," Goldsby paused to remark.

" 'I know you'll make the best of it,' the letter went on.

" Bet your life I will," Goldsby declared. " Life isn't worth living on any other basis."

He made these breaks in the reading with the most deliberate purpose, as if the letter were a mere trifle in any event, and the parts of it which elicited these remarks were the most important of all it contained.

" 'You'll find somebody out there to hobnob with.'

" Knows me pretty well, don't he?" said Goldsby, pausing to look up at Goodpasture. " But he's right. I guess it's a part of my make-up to hobnob as he calls it, and I've got to do it or die. But there might be worse crimes, eh—old man?" (nudging Goodpasture) " and if you and I don't die till we are hung for liking the society

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of good fellows, we're likely to stay here for some time. But let's go on. Let's see?" and he turned the page, where he searched awhile, running his eye along the lines and mumbling now and then a word.

"Oh, here it is," he said, and continued the reading:

" 'I've got a great business enterprise on hand, a larger and more meritorious one than I have ever before undertaken, and I'm getting greatly interested in it. I thought when I last saw you that I should never buckle down to business again with all my might and main; but this thing has come my way, and somehow I feel it a positive duty to take it up. This, not so much for what there is in it for me (though I think I ought to get good return for my time and money out of it,—a fellow ought to do that) as for the blessing it will be to humanity, or at least to many thousands of my fellow-men.'

"He's one of the most generous souls in all the world, is Starleigh," Goldsby remarked in passing.

" 'When I was in southern France last year, it happened that during my stay there came up one of those terrific tornado-hailstorms which that

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region is so subject to, and which used to do so much damage to the vineyards in all that country.

“ ‘Now I don’t know as you are aware of it, for such things never had much charm for you, you never could get as near the ground as that—’

“ ‘Lord, but he’s onto me,” from Goldsby, with a shake of the head.

“ ‘That they have actually demonstrated the fact that those terrible storms can be averted and practically dispelled (at least rendered harmless) by bombarding the clouds with heavy cannon as the storm is coming up. The guns are short, stubby things, a kind of mortar, and they fire bombs straight up into the clouds with them. These bombs burst in the air and literally blow the clouds to pieces.

“ ‘Well, as I was saying, I was fortunate enough to witness one of these performances,—saw the whole thing, and so know that it isn’t a fake. You know my tendency to doubt almost everything that I don’t see myself, and I’m free to confess that though I’d heard of the like before, I really didn’t more than half believe it was true. But now I’ve seen it, and so I know what I’m talking about.’

“ ‘Squarest man ever drew the breath of life,” said Goldsby. “ ‘Can’t stand a lie or a fake with-in a million miles of him.”

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“ ‘ I saw the storm coming up, the men get their guns ready, and at the proper time do the bombarding. The cloud was a terribly threatening one, but the firing broke it into ten thousand fragments, and instead of a raging tempest there was only a copious rain which greatly benefited the vines instead of tearing them all to pieces. I assure you the sight was an awesome one, and it kept me thinking for many a day and night after I saw it.’

“ Darndest fellow to take things up that way, and keep working ’em over in his mind that I ever saw. He’s made one or two fortunes that way, though, but it wears on him. I suppose he really can’t help it,” he explained.

Goodpasture reined the team out of the road just here, and a string of a dozen or more farm wagons returning empty from town passed them in a long procession. Goldsby suspended his reading and both men reviewed the line as it went by. The horses were stout and well-kept. The wagons were heavy and strong. The side-boards on the wagon beds were three and four feet high. The drivers sat on their spring seats well up in the air, shouting back and forth to each other as they drove along.

When the last team had gone by, Goodpasture took the road again and Goldsby remarked:

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"Great country this. Can beat the world for crops when they get a good year. And see what loads they can haul to market. Some of these beds will hold more than a hundred bushels."

"It's God's country when things come right," Goodpasture assented.

Upon the utterance of this sentiment, which was in perfect accord with what Goldsby was about to disclose (things were coming his way all right), he resumed the reading of the letter.

"Let's see. Where was I?" he said, scanning the page to find where he left off. "Oh, yes.

"—Kept me thinking for many a day and night after I saw it. And do you know, it finally came to me that if this bombarding can be used so successfully in manipulating clouds and storms in southern France, there is no reason in the world why the same force should not be utilized still further by way of producing, or at least modifying, atmospheric phenomena in other parts of the world.'

"Guess that's all right, isn't it?" said Goldsby to Goodpasture. "Good logic, anyhow," he added, and then went on reading:

"Now you are well aware that what the great West needs is rain.'

"True, O king!" from Goodpasture.

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The virus was getting in its work, and the victim was beginning to respond according to plans made and provided. Goldsby went right on:

“ ‘ You’ve been all over the region and so know the bottom facts better than I do, though I know enough about them for practical purposes.

“ ‘ There has been a theory for years that heavy bombarding would produce rain, and on the strength of my observations in France I have been studying this subject for the last six months. I can’t go into details here, but I beg to assure you that I have found out enough to convince me that if it is done right, any quantity of rain can be lured from the skies (I might better say compelled from the skies), whenever and wherever needed. I became fascinated with the subject, and have gone to the bottom of it, so that there is not a doubt in the world, to my mind, about the ultimate facts. At least I am convinced of the truth of my theory, and what I am after now is a chance to demonstrate what I believe to be true.’

“ If he’s made up his mind that way, I’d be willing to stake my earthly all that he’s right about it,” Goldsby observed.

“ ‘ But the point is right here: it will take a barrel of money to demonstrate what I believe to be true, and while I’ve got a penny or two to blow

on it myself, I haven't got enough to carry the whole load. The truth is, all the experimentation that has been done, so far, has been on altogether too small a scale. What I must have is a plant that is large enough to prove something with, and such a plant is going to cost a fortune.'

"He'll get it, too, before he gets through," from Goldsby. "Greatest man I ever knew for carrying out a plan, when he once gets it into his mind." Then he continued:

"With these facts in mind I have devised a plan that will enable me to carry out my ideas. I have the business well in hand, and have proceeded with it so far that the next step is to choose a place for demonstration and procure the right to operate there.'

"Now here's where I come in," Goldsby observed.

"It was at just this point that I learned that you were spending the winter in Nebraska, and it at once occurred to me that there could be no better place in all the world to try the experiment than in that state. Furthermore, it seems to me possible that you might help me to get a charter to do what I want the opportunity of doing. You are on the ground, you have time at your dis-

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posals, and you really have the natural ability to procure what I want.'

"See him flatter me," said Goldsby. "Never did a thing of the kind in my life, and don't know anything more about it than a goat."

"Never too old to learn," Goodpasture observed.

Things were going all right.

"And so, to come right at it, I'm writing you this to find out what you think about it. Do you know anything about the legislature now in session in Lincoln? Is it made up of clean and liberal-minded men, or are they a lot of politicians on the lookout for what they can make out of their winter's job? If the latter, we'll saw it off, right here, for I've no use for that sort of cattle.'

"Clean as cloth!" said Goldsby.

"But if they're progressive men, I'd like a charter from their honorable body that would give me a right to exploit my theory in some one county in the state. That will be enough to prove what I believe to be true, and if it were found to be what I am certain it is, then other territory could be worked on later. I should want the privilege of choosing the county to work in, for the territory ought to be decided upon only after the most careful examination had given us more definite data

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than could possibly be obtained before the legislature will adjourn. There could be no trouble about that, though, for any county in the state might well be glad to have us locate within its boundaries.'

Goodpasture sat listening, but he said never a word. He drove the horses and kept thinking.

" 'So now won't you do this for me, old man? Get your eye onto the legislature, and make up your mind as to what manner of men they are, whether it is probable they would take to such a proposition as I have to make. Then write me your opinion (I need not say that such letter would be confidential), and if you think there is a fair probability of getting such a charter in Nebraska, would you be willing to help me in the premises? I'd be willing to pay you for your time and trouble, though I know well enough that if you take hold of the enterprise money will be the last thing you will think of. But the laborer is worthy of his hire.

" 'Excuse this long letter. I hope to hear from you soon and favorably, and ever I am,

" 'Faithfully yours,

" 'G. W. STARLEIGH.

" 'P.S. I don't want to hurry you, and yet I'd like an early reply. For if you decide there is no show at all for me in Nebraska, I want to see

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what can be done in Kansas or South Dakota. So let me hear from you as soon as possible.

“ ‘G. W. S.’

“There! How’s that?” Goldsby exclaimed, as he folded up the letter and put it in his pocket.

Goodpasture handed over the lines, and said that he thought the letter was a very able presentation of the case. That the subject was one of vital interest to Nebraska, and something that he had often wondered about himself.

“Well, what do you think about the legislature?” Goldsby asked, making straight for the main issue with all the disingenuousness of an amateur.

“That’s too big a question to be answered out of hand and at such short notice,” Goodpasture replied. “Especially at this distance,” he added with a laugh and a wave of his hand toward the capitol, which was just coming into sight.

“Right you are,” Goldsby responded. “I had no business to ask the question, but I blurt out everything that comes into my head when I’m with you. I’ll go up and take a look at the gentlemen myself. I won’t bother you with it. Maybe I oughtn’t to have read you the letter at all,” he added apologetically.

“And why not?” Goodpasture returned. “I

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assure you I was greatly interested in it, and my interest is by no means at an end because I hesitate to give you an opinion as to the prospects of your friend's getting a charter from our assembly. That would be a thing to make up one's mind about as the nature of the plan was made known. I can say this, though, right now, that I believe we have as fair-minded a set of men in this legislature as ever sat in a similar body."

"Good enough!" Goldsby declared. "That's the very thing Starleigh wants to know first. I'll write him so much to-night, if you don't object."

"No objection in the world," said Goodpasture. "Just tell him exactly what I have said—no more, no less. Don't give him the idea that I give any opinion whatever as to what the assembly would do with his enterprise. Just say that I'm ready to put myself on record, anywhere, that we've got a clean set of men at the capitol this year. That much I am sure of and am glad to say anywhere."

"I'll say that and no more, and may the Lord add his blessing," said Goldsby, as he picked up the whip and set the horses off at a spanking pace.

He drove Goodpasture to his boarding house and then hastened to his room to write Starleigh, who had just returned from his short trip abroad.

CHAPTER XIX.

GOLDSBY ate a hearty supper, smoked a good cigar, and then sat down alone in his room and wrote his partner, as follows:

LINCOLN, Neb., Jan. 30, 190..

MY DEAR STARLEIGH:

If you and I were alone in this deal, as we once were, I should loaf the evening away as best I could, knowing that you would be content to live in hopes, backed up by an abiding faith in me and my ability to get there; but because we are now blessed with the luxury of a couple of darling colaborers who will want to be kept posted as to how matters are running at this end of the line, I take my typewriter in hand (Machine, not girl! I'm too busy for that sort of thing now! "Hard labor is the friend of good morals," old Billsbury used to say) to let you know that I am well, and hope these few lines will find you,—find you! Yes, that's just it,—just what I want 'em to do, "merely that and nothing more." If they find you, it will be all right. But if they don't find you, and should find somebody else, or somebody else should find

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them, it could do no harm,—a thing that I am profoundly thankful for.

What a blessed thing a typewriting machine is! How utterly it annihilates the individual, and removes all danger of personal responsibility for what one has really said! It is the universal dissolvent of identity, so far as a tangible record is concerned. Here I am, pounding away at the keyboard, saying anything and everything to you that I choose to say; and yet even if this missive should go astray nothing could ever be proved by it. For I shall sign my name with the machine, and that settles it! John Doe or Richard Roe may have done the work! Probably they did! At least, any good lawyer could prove that they probably did and that I probably didn't, in any court that I know anything about. Truly Justice is blind! So stone-blind that she don't know a good thing when it's right under her nose! But you and I needn't kick on that, and the bulk of humanity are with us in the sentiment.

But I didn't sit down to write platitudes about current methods of doing things that the dear people have no business with. There always have been such things and ways of handling them, and there always will be the like. The ways of working vary, as the years go on and necessity mothers new inventions for beating the devil around the

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stump. But the stump remains and the devil will get around it somehow. "This is a mad world, my masters."

Well, here's to you!

You can say to the dear twins on the Rialto that things are coming our way on schedule time and that we have a clear track ahead, with every probability of our pulling into the terminal on the minute with the safety valve blowing off. That's the generic statement of affairs as they are to-night. For particulars, see below.

Item: I have met our man and he is ours. He is all I could ask or hope for, and I'm getting him so well broken to harness that he minds without the least touch of a whip. I'm glad of that. Whips are cruel things, and sometimes they are infernal troublesome. . . .and expensive! I never like to use a whip, and we shan't have to, this time.

Item: I put in a full six hours with Pleasant-feed to-day, and gave him the first full dose of our vitalizing elixir. He swallowed it to the last drop and showed no ill effects from taking the potion. On the contrary, it seemed to agree with him and he with it most excellent well. May all future gulps do likewise!

Item: The cup I compounded for him to imbibe was sweetened and flavored to deceive the very elect, and over such sweetening and flavoring

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I labored for days and nights, as witness the enclosed letter which did the work. When you have read it, if you don't say it's smooth and oily, I'll throw up my job. When I had it finished (I rewrote it at least a dozen times before I finally got it right) I felt as though the god of inspiration had guided my hands as they pounded the keys on this machine that made the record.

Item: I read this letter to his unsuspecting Nibs while we were taking a long ride in the country this afternoon. Nibs likes to ride and I have found a splendid team that likes to take us out,—for a consideration. That is, that we may consider. All men ought to consider. We considered considerable this afternoon. (Don't swear. I won't do it again.)

You can imagine the story I put up before I drew this document on the boy as we rode. We became more confidential than ever (and you know we've always been afflicted that way to a great degree) and finally I made bold to ask his advice. Ask a man's advice, and get him to counsel you, and nine times out of ten he's yours to command.

So I asked his advice.

And I got it. Not a large installment, but enough to show that there is a plentiful supply in stock, and that it may be had as needed.

To come right down to business, I succeeded in

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greatly interesting our friend in our enterprise, and there is not a doubt in the world that he will do everything for us that we want done. He realizes fully the need of water in this state, and as soon as I get him moved on a little further he'll begin to walk in the way we want him to go.

I am glad to be able to report that our aider and abettor is making a fine start in the legislature. He is the man of men for our business in that body. Being absolutely independent and absolutely above reproach, his influence is sought by all the political parties and politicians at the capitol. Instead of being let alone, he is really at the head of the procession, so far as getting what he wants is concerned. So many men and parties wish him to come their way that they all toady to him all the time. I haven't been up to the legislative halls yet,—have felt it best to keep a trifle in the shade, so far; when I do go up, I shall appear as the dear friend of the gentleman who stands alone, but is much sought after by all who are in favor of standing together. Could I have a better entrée to that honorable body?

As for that body, it is composed of just about the average lot in such cases made and provided. Take the members as a whole, they are a pretty crude company. But they are dead sure they know what they want, most of 'em, and that makes 'em

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all very much in earnest,—a quality that adds zest to their proceedings and removes boredom from what they do. I think I shall really enjoy sitting through some of their sessions when I get where my presence is needed in the third house.

So far so good, and now:—

I don't want to crowd the mourners at your end of the line, but I really wish you could get Stampum to help me out a little in drafting a charter which will be just what we want. I've worked at it, hours and hours, for the past month or more, but I haven't got what I (we) want (For we all want just the right thing,—must have it). If I could only get as good a scald on it as I did on the letter I read to Greengrass this afternoon I'd be happy, but somehow it don't come.

I have time and again made a skin of words for it that was as fine as silk and as smooth as satin to cover its body withal. Then I have padded the skin out with the most diplomatic and unsuspecting looking phrases that I could possibly devise. I have worked at this till what I have constructed has more than once seemed to me without a flaw when I had it finished. I have many times put my product aside as perfect. But when I have let it stand for a few hours and come back to it for review, I'm blest if the skeleton of the "critter" I've tried so hard to conceal don't show

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through, not to say stick out all over it, till a blind man could see every bone in its carcass!

And this won't do. You know I'm doing my best at it, and that nothing but absolute necessity would ever make me suggest help. But the day draws near (I think it's close at hand) when I must submit a charter for the approval of my friend Beside-the-still-waters, and I don't want to show him anything that he can possibly shake his head over. I want him to nod at my beck from the very start. He's done so thus far and I want to keep him at it.

Say! How will this do? Suppose I do my level best at drafting a charter and then send it to you for approval? You put on your confiding-consultation face and go down and submit the same to Hookem and Stringem. Get it to Stringem direct, if possible. Don't read it to him, but shove it under his nose and let him do the rest. If he looks at the wall, sneak off and leave him alone with it, and I believe you'll fetch him. If he can once absorb what I present, that will be enough. If it isn't right he'll say so, and to have him do even that will be of value. If he will only put his finger on any weak places that he comes across, so much the better. To have him draft the whole thing would be the best. Try for it, and I'll pray for you.

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Please gently indicate to our dear Ropeum that it will be exceedingly conducive to the smooth-running qualities of our common conveyance, present and prospective, if the western axle be lubricated to the extent of a couple of thousand, forthwith. He's the boy that carries the grease pot, and it is his inestimable privilege to pour oil into boxes lest they get hot. Thank Heaven I shan't have to call on him often! All I shall need will be enough for my own moderate expenses here in the house for a few weeks yet, with a tip here and there to various and sundry, as we have to have 'em.

Just as soon as we get our charter we'll be in shape to fry the grease out of the dear lambs that are waiting for us, and lambs are so full of fat! Their oleaginous residuum is a most excellent panacea for all sorts of things, as well as nourishing food for some people. Multitudes of people in good and regular standing have been known to subsist on it, and it only, for years, and gain in weight continually! Indeed, I confess to a great partiality for the diet myself, and all that I've ever had of it has only made me long for more.

And you? Enough!

"This is all at present," as I used to say in closing my country-boy love letters to Kate Beals. Lord,

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but that was a long time ago! I wonder if I, who now sit here plotting to take forcible possession of one-fourth part of the whole earth, or to be one of four to have a cinch on the whole thing,—I wonder if I am the same being who lay awake nights thinking of Katie Beals! Well, so or no, there is enough of the same left in me to remember that she was a beautiful girl, and——

Stuff! I'll work out the charter to-morrow and get it off to you. Meantime, let me hear from Sluggum, for the needs of the body remain and are continually with us.

Truly thine,

GOLDSBY.

CHAPTER XX.

IN the days that followed, Goldsby saw Goodpasture frequently and ever their friendship grew. The representative frequently came to the lobby of the Lincoln, and Goldsby always had him in his rooms for a few minutes during each visit. Goodpasture was a good smoker and could manage a few glasses of wine at a sitting in a creditable manner. Goldsby was a bit surprised when he discovered this accomplishment on the part of his friend, but he was far more delighted than he was amazed. After he found it out, he took pains always to have a good supply of the best brands on the shelf behind the bath room door.

On two or three occasions they went down into the hotel lobby together and Goodpasture introduced him to some of the most prominent members of both houses. The representative always spoke of him in these introductions, as "My friend, Mr. Goldsby, from the East, who happens to be spending the winter here and who is a good fellow to know. Spent some time with me at my house last fall, hoping to dump that cough of his

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into one or more of the 'blow-outs' in our region." With these and other genial words of like kind, Goodpasture made him known to the members.

This was all as Goldsby would have it, to the last turn. He was a most excellent "mixer," told a story well and had an unending fund of all sorts and sizes of them suited to the needs and delights of all sorts and conditions of men. The result was that he soon "stood pat" with a number of legislators, though he held himself afar off from being in the least familiar with them. Only one or two of them ever saw the inside of his room, and even these got nothing from the shelf behind the bath room door. He held himself before them as a thoroughly upright gentleman who was just a little bored at being obliged to be where he was, but who would make the best of it for the sake of his cough, which was much in evidence.

Truth to tell, he was much observed and greatly wondered over. His rooms were at the very head of the lobbyists' row, and yet he was doing none of the things that were done in the other apartments. Goodpasture was his only intimate, and he had given no sign whatever to any member that Goldsby wanted anything of him or of anybody else. It was strange, to say the least. So the rank and file wondered over it and waited.

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Finally the time came for another turn of the wheel. It was at the close of a very pleasant evening spent in Goldsby's rooms, and after Goodpasture had risen to say good night. Goldsby held his hand as they walked to the door, talking as they went, and just as the representative was reaching out his palm to turn the knob, Goldsby said:

"Oh, by the way, I had another letter from my friend in the East to-day, and I want to talk to you just a little about it before you go. I swear, I 'most forgot it, for when I'm with you business is the last thing in the world to come into my mind. He is ever so urgent that I should do what I can for him in the way of getting the charter he wrote about in the letter I read you the other day. I wrote him what you said about the make-up of the legislature here, and he thinks it's all right, that the men are of a kind he'd like to do business with. So he wrote me to take hold for him. What do you think about it? Could I do anything? Would it be worth while for me to try, knowing as little as I do about such things, and really caring as little as I do about them?"

Goldsby drew back towards his chair as he said this, and Goodpasture followed slowly, hat in hand. For who could resist such an appeal for counsel in the presence of such innocence and

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need? They sat down again and Goldsby continued:

"I've thought the ground over pretty carefully, but I can't come to any definite conclusion. Most of the time I feel that the only thing to do is to give the whole thing the go-by. It isn't at all to my liking, and there are phases of it that are decidedly distasteful to me. There's a sense in which it looks like lobbying, and whenever that side of it looms up I say *no*, instanter and with a vengeance. The idea of my putting myself on a par with the sort of cattle that are stabled on this row, clear around the corridor,—well, you can imagine how I feel when I think of its being even possible for me to be thought of as in the same class with them. Of course, I shouldn't be in the same class with them, for what Mr. Starleigh wants is a perfectly clean and legitimate thing, and will prove to be a godsend to the whole state, beyond question, if he gets what he asks for; but what I dread is that it might look to some people as if I'd got down pretty low, and was training with a pretty tough gang.

"Why, do you know," he went on, bending over, and speaking low, "that it is perfectly scandalous the things that are going on in some of these rooms. I'm no eavesdropper, but my sense of hearing is very acute, and you see there are

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wide folding doors between these rooms and those next so the sound comes through mighty easy, and I can't help hearing some of the things that are said."

He grew more confidential, and putting out his hand he drew Goodpasture off the arm of the chair and down into its seat again. Then he drew closer, and spoke almost in a whisper:

"It is a marvel to me how some men will be taken in. I overheard the funniest thing the other night after I had gone to bed. The little book agent that has the next room was working one of the brethren from some back county in great style. He'd evidently got a lot of cheap whiskey, and he was filling the fellow up on it. I heard him say, as he poured out a glass (he's an Englishman): 'This whusky is the vintage of '30, and there's less than ten gallons of it left in all the world! I got this bottle from a gran'son of the man who made it in Kentucky. The old man left it to him in his wull, and stipulated that the barrel shouldn't be opened till the liquor was seventy years old. So they tapped it on last New Year's day. It had shrunk so that there was less than ten gallons of it all told; but what it lacked in quantity it made up in quality.' Did you ever see anything as oily as that?"

Goldsby spoke low, but he did the story full

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justice, acting it out as he told it. They both laughed at the dénouement, and Goldsby said:

"I'll bet a horse that the stuff would burn a hole in a copper boiler, but the fellow evidently took it for the real thing. Oh, it's shameful.

"But to get back to where I left off," he continued. "As I was saying, sometimes it seems to me that I really can't undertake this for my friend; but when, on the other hand, I think of what a clean man and royal good fellow he is, and of the fact that what he proposes to do is for the good of thousands of his fellow-men, why then it seems to me I ought to do what I can for him,—that there is a kind of duty about it that I ought not to shirk."

"I don't think that you ought to feel that there is any danger of disgrace," Goodpasture responded, "if you are only sure that the cause you represent is strictly all right. I remember hearing my father tell about Abraham Lincoln's once drawing a bill for him and working it through the Illinois legislature. Father said he paid him a hundred dollars for it, too. But the bill was a good one, and Lincoln's time was worth money. Of course it was long before he was president, or ever dreamed he would be, but he did the work all right, and father paid him what he asked for it. There's a phase of such work that is per-

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fectly legitimate,—good mixed up with the bad, as there is everywhere else.”

“I’m awfully glad to hear you say that,” Goldsby returned, “and it is very kind of you, though just like you, to assure me and show me how foolish some of my notions are. But the whole thing is so new to me, and what I’ve seen of it has been so infernally rotten that I came near being disgusted with the whole thing. But what you say is all right. Starleigh is as true as steel, as good as gold, and as straight as a line. He wouldn’t touch a dishonest or a dishonorable thing with a rod pole. So I’m all right there. But I swear I don’t know how to go at it,” he said, questioningly.

“Well, the first thing is to formulate what you want,” Goodpasture replied. “Get it into shape so that it shall be perfectly clear just how much and just how little you desire, make the text of your bill as short, simple and definite as possible, then get some member to introduce it for you, have it referred to the proper committee, then go before them and answer any questions they think it wise to ask, and get them to report favorably upon it if you can. That’s the routine, and there is nothing very hard to do about it, so far as the regular thing is concerned. Make sure of the merits of your bill to start on. Then get as in-

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fluent a member as possible to introduce it for you, and be able to talk right to the point when you get before the committee, and that's all that anybody can do with any bill legitimately. You have ten times the ability to do all this successfully that most men have who undertake it."

"Oh, don't flatter me," Goldsby protested. "It's one thing to talk to you, in the quiet of my own room, and quite another to go up against a committee that are laying for you just because you are asking for something. Still, it's a great source of assurance to me that you think I could do the work; but I tell you right now that if I do undertake it you'll have to agree to keep an eye on me and to head me off if you see me doing some fool thing that I ought not to."

Goldsby said this in a careless way, as if it were a mere trifle, and hardly worth talking about. But with his inner eye he was watching Goodpasture closely, and his heart went low as he waited an instant for reply.

"Why, of course I'll set you right if I see you going wrong," Goodpasture responded with a laugh. "There's always a kind of satisfaction in doing that for anybody, and especially for one's friends. Makes one conscious of his own superiority to call some one else down."

"Oh, come off!" Goldsby replied, as he

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slapped Goodpasture on the leg. "Mighty little pleasure you'd ever get out of the like of that. You hate to see anybody fall so much that you couldn't get any fun out of picking them up, only the delight of seeing them on their feet again. But you'd be sorry for 'em all the time. I've seen the quality in you a hundred times. But I'll count on your seeing me through if I start in. Just see that I do the proper thing, and help me do it right whenever you can, and I'll be awfully obliged to you. If I don't change my mind before morning I'll write to Starleigh that I'll do what I can for him, and I shall tell him that whatever I do I shall do under the eye of a friend of mine who knows what the right thing is and who will see that I do it. That's all right, and I'm sure Starleigh will be delighted at the situation.

"But I mustn't keep you longer," Goldsby protested, rising as he spoke. "I'm awfully obliged to you for your advice, and it was ever so good of you to give it to me."

Goodpasture did not rise on the instant, and presently he said:

"It is none of my affair, but why doesn't your friend come out and attend to this business himself?"

Goldsby swore inwardly as he stood there, but

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before he could say anything Goodpasture went on:

"I say to you frankly," he said, "that while I am sure you will make a first-class representative for him and his interests, if you do as you propose, yet there is always a great advantage to be gained by dealing with principals direct. In his letter that you read to me the other day, your friend said the enterprise was larger than any he had ever undertaken, and if he is going to try to furnish water for the whole state of Nebraska, or even one good-sized county in it, he certainly has a big contract on his hands. I don't volunteer advice, but my notion is that it would be well for you to close your letter to him by advising him to come right here himself and advocate his own cause. No reflections on you or your abilities," he added, as he rose to go, "but you know I promised to head you into the best path, so far as I could."

"I'll write that way, of course," Goldsby responded. He was rejoiced beyond telling that Goodpasture's remarks, which he had proceeded with immediately after he had asked his vexatious question, had removed the necessity of his explaining why Starleigh did not come west.

"I ought to have thought of that myself," he

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continued, "but, as I told you, I'm stupid. You've put me right on the first round, and I think more of you than ever. You've got a head that's as clear as a bell, and if Starleigh comes out, I'll tell him you are the man to introduce his bill.

"And I'll make him come," he went on before Goodpasture could protest. "I'll tell him that you say it'll be a great advantage, and that you know what you are talking about. Oh, he'll come all right. And I'll be awfully glad to have you know him, too, for he's the best fellow that ever lived. Won't it be great if he can be the means of making this whole state, and the whole West, for that matter, blossom like a garden of the Lord? Well, we'll see!

"Better take one more glass of wine before you go," he added. "We haven't hardly tasted of it all the evening, we've been so busy talking, and it's good stuff to taste when you get to it."

Goldsby filled their glasses, and as they were raising them to their lips he said, holding his glass high:

"Here's to Starleigh's bombarding scheme! May it make the water come down from the skies till Nebraska shall be the foremost state in the Union!"

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They drank with enthusiasm, and as they went towards the door Goldsby said:

“ We’ve had a grand night. Come again ! ”

Goodpasture thought many things as he went to his lodgings.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOR the next week or so Goldsby kept himself out of Goodpasture's sight, for the most part. He felt that he had crowded his man so exceedingly hard at their last interview that it would be the wisest thing to give him a little time to get his breath. He counted also that it was best for him to appear in no way over-anxious or in haste about the business. He ran into Omaha for a brief stay to occupy the time.

But when the hours of his waiting were ended he sent for Goodpasture and had him in his rooms again. This time he went at once to business, for the representative seemed restless and somewhat bored. At least Goldsby thought he did.

"I dislike to trouble you," Goldsby began, "for I know you are very busy, but I have just received another letter from Mr. Starleigh, a reply to the one I wrote embodying your suggestion that he should come west himself and look after his bill. He says that you are right about it, and that he knows it is exactly what he ought to do; but that he is in the midst of a series of chemical and electrical experiments that have to do with

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the success of this enterprise, and that it is absolutely impossible for him to leave, and will be so for several weeks, or until it is too late for him to do anything with this legislature. He says he regrets it exceedingly, and knows that a man has no business to get too many irons in the fire; but chemical mixtures once made up won't keep indefinitely, nor will they wait for anybody. He's the only man who has a complete knowledge of what has been done so far, and so the only thing is for him to stay where he is and work out the problems that he alone can solve.

"Now as for the business out here, he urges me harder than ever to help him out, because of the fix he's in. He says that every day of his study and experimentation adds to the positive proof that his theories are all correct, and he is now absolutely certain that he can supply the whole of the arid West with all the water they need. But of course, what would convince him might not convince other men, so he has to work out the details so that everybody can see what he can actually do."

"Maybe he had better wait a couple of years, or till the next session of the legislature," Goodpasture suggested.

Goldsby winced, but rallied to the emergency.

"He spoke of that in his letter," he replied,

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“but he says he can’t bear to think of doing so, for it will delay the boon of water to a thirsty land for two years—”

“It’s been thirsty for a long time,” Goodpasture put in, “and a couple of years won’t be so very long to wait if only they can be sure of all the water they want from that time on.”

Goldsby could have crushed him, but he only smiled and went on:

“Yes, that’s all true,” he said, “and perhaps that’s the best way, after all; and yet, Starleigh is such an awfully good fellow, and he’s such a devoted friend of mine that if I can help him out I feel as though I ought to do it. He’s got his heart set on getting a charter from this legislature, and it will be a great blow to him if it isn’t forthcoming. He feels, from what I have written him about the members I have met, and what you have told me about them, that they are an exceptionally able body of men, and that’s another reason why he is specially anxious to have them act on his charter. He is sure they will comprehend the value of what he proposes, and he don’t know what the next legislature might be like. It’s a sort of a ‘bird in the hand’ business, you know.”

He paused for a minute, but as Goodpasture sat there thinking and saying never a word, he went on again:

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"Now what he wants is that I should get you to present his bill for him."

Goodpasture shook his head slowly, without taking his eyes off the carpet. Goldsby saw the gesture, and hastened to head off the negative it announced:

"Oh, don't be so modest, man! You can do it. You've got more friends than any man in the house, and I know it. If I could have had my pick of the flock I should have chosen you; but of course, I wouldn't do that, for a man wouldn't use a friendship in a business way. If it were my own affair, now, I'd never think of asking you to touch it. But, things being as they are, and Mr. Starleigh having made the suggestion, why, that's another thing."

Goodpasture shook his head no more, and Goldsby continued:

"He's got up his charter and sent it to me," he said.

He went to his desk and produced the document, elaborately engraved on the most costly paper and duly wound about with red tape. He unrolled it and spread it out before Goodpasture.

"Now, I've read the thing through two or three times," he went on, "and it seems to me all right. Of course I don't know much about such things, for they never interested me in the

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least, and a man don't know about things he don't care for. But so far as I can see, the bill is strictly all right."

Goodpasture took the document and began reading it to himself. Goldsby watched him as he read, his heart beating hard. The sweat was beginning to show on his forehead.

Goodpasture went on with the reading, but his face gave no sign of his thoughts. Now and then he would turn back and re-read a paragraph. On one or two of them which were very short and so could be read at a glance, he paused for what seemed to Goldsby a young eternity. Finally he laid the paper on the table and said:

"It is a very ably drawn bill. Mr. Starleigh must have had considerable experience in such matters. It is really a great pity he can't be here, as expert as he is."

"Oh, he never drew the thing himself, I'll bet a horse," Goldsby hastened to reply. "He'd never take the chances on a thing like that. What he probably did was to go to some expert in that line, tell him just what he wanted, and pay the fellow to put it into form for him. That's the best way, always, in any specialty business. If a man wants artistic work, let him employ an artist. That's Starleigh, every time. That's what he did, I'm sure, and that's how he got so

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perfect a bill the first shot out of the box. It's all right, isn't it?"

"It's a well drawn bill," Goodpasture replied, "so far as its form is concerned. As to its substance, there are a number of things in it that would probably require considerable investigation, for they are very comprehensive and far-reaching."

"Of course," Goldsby interlarded. "It would naturally be so, for what he proposes to do covers a great deal of ground,—a good many thousand square miles," and he laughed at his words. "But all those things, questions and answers, catechism and so forth, they would all come up in the committee, wouldn't they? That's where such things regularly do come up, isn't it? That's what committees are for. Of course I don't know anything about it, but that's what I'd always supposed."

"Yes, they would come up there," Goodpasture replied. "But the probabilities of a bill getting through depend very largely on the amount of investigation that the committee having charge of it has to do. Such men are burdened with work, and if they have to put in too much time asking questions and hearing catechism recitations they get tired and drop the whole business. So it is wise to have as few chances for raising objections as possible. I think you see the point."

"Sure!" Goldsby responded. "A man can't

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help seeing anything that you explain. I swear, you'd make mud as clear as spring water if once you undertook to do so. Do I understand then," he went on, "that you think there are too many things in the bill as Starleigh has it now to give it a good show for getting through? Shall I write that to him? That you say so?"

"No," Goodpasture replied, "I should prefer not to be quoted at all in the premises. I have no advice to give regarding this particular bill. What I have to say is merely general. The freer a bill is from points that might raise questions in the minds of the committee, the fewer the chances of its being turned down. That's a safe principle to work by. And I am free to say that if I were on the committee that had the consideration of this bill there are several questions that I should wish to ask."

He looked Goldsby quite steadily in the eye as he said this, but the visual organs of both men were a blank as they gazed. The parchment slipped from the edge of the table and Goldsby leaned forward and picked it up. He was on the point of asking Goodpasture to point out the objectionable features of the bill, but an instant's reflection convinced him that such a request would precipitate matters altogether too soon, and bring on an issue at once that he yet hoped might never

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be made manifest. He rolled up the bill slowly (he wanted to crush it, or strike Goodpasture over the head with it) and finally said:

"Well, I suppose the best thing to do then is to send this bill back to Starleigh and tell him that it's too complicated in its present form, and that he'd better simplify it if he wants to have it pass at this session. That's the way you feel about it?" And he appealed to Goodpasture.

"I'm sure that a bill asking for less than this bill does would stand a better chance of approval by the committee that would have charge of it," Goodpasture said. "In the interest of your friend, I should like to see him succeed in what he undertakes, or what you undertake for him. As a friend of yours I should dislike to have you ask and not receive, to see you knock and not get opened unto. It is good of you to undertake to help your friend out, but he ought not to ask the impossible of you."

"You are right," Goldsby declared. "You are right, as you always are, and you are doing me a great favor by heading me off where I confess I've been in danger of going wrong. That's what you promised to do, you know, and you're doing it all right."

"Of course, I hate to send this bill back to him," he went on, "for it seemed to me all right,

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when I read it over last night. In fact, I felt so much pleased with it, and was so sure that it was O. K. that I sat down and wrote Starleigh I was certain it would be a go. But I was dead wrong. That's what comes from speaking too quick,—from talking about what you aren't well posted on.

"But never mind," he added, "he can fix it up, or get it fixed up for him. He'll probably know what to cut out,—what he can and what he can't, for he knows all about it. I suppose the matter of fact is that he is so stuck on what he's got that he thinks everybody else ought to feel just as he does about it, and be ready to give all he asks without a word of question or objection. Probably he didn't realize how much he was asking for. But if he's asked for too much on the first round, perhaps,—Oh well! No use for you and me to bother our heads about it. You're too busy and it's a bore to me. I'll fire the thing back to him and tell him to make it smaller. That it's too big for this country in its present shape, and he'd better knock off some of its corners, eh?"

"I still think he'd better come and look after it himself," Goodpasture remarked after a few moments' silence. "Even if you take the main features of the bill, those that would have to remain to make it of any value at all, there are

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things in it that would have to be explained that only an expert could answer. And it seems from what Mr. Starleigh writes that he is the only man who knows all about the business. It seems to me that he would have to appear in person before the committee, and if he should have to do that, he might as well come one time as another."

"Looks that way, don't it?" Goldsby asserted. "Well, all I can do is to report things to him just as they are, and then he'll have to do what he can about it. I can't bother too much with the thing. First thing I know, if I get too much interested in the business it'll keep me awake nights, and that'll work against the chances of my shedding this cursed cough this winter, and I can't afford to pay that price, even for a friend who can wet up the American Desert. A man has some duties to himself."

"You certainly can't afford to sacrifice your health just to accommodate," Goodpasture assented as he rose to go.

"Can you take a drive this afternoon?" Goldsby asked as they neared the door.

"Sorry to say no," Goodpasture replied, "but I can't do it. I'm on a committee that has a very important bill before it this evening, and I've got to do some looking up about it before the meet-

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ing. It's hard work, this law-making business;" and he went his way.

After he had gone, Goldsby sat down and wrote Starleigh that the best thing for all concerned was that "the whole outfit" should come to Lincoln and camp there till the battle was won.

"Tell K. & M.," he wrote, "that everything is all right, but that the way things have shaped themselves it will greatly expedite matters for us all to be on the ground. And what we want now is expedition," he continued. "The winter is wearing away and our souls are not saved. I didn't mean to have it so, but you know we can't always have things just as we want 'em. So shut up shop at your end of the line, link arms with the dearly beloved who carry the bag, and come on. I'll put you on, and tell you all about it when you get here. It's all here, but it takes a full gang to land a net full of fish, and then it's always good sport to be in at the killing."

He mailed the letter, and after lunch went into Omaha again for a few days. While there, he labored with the bill, working till his brain reeled to hide still more cleverly the things that he knew Goodpasture saw standing out over and above everything else.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO days later a message was forwarded from Lincoln to Omaha, where Goldsby was still staying. It read as follows: "Jewsharp Susanna microbe introspection whale oil clitocybe karma." Which being translated showed thus: "We will all be on hand on first train. Wire what hotels we shall go to."

To this Goldsby replied within ten minutes after he had deciphered the above: "Vinegar glucose hydrate responsive alternate miocene ethnology." This Starleigh read a little later: "Have Ketchum and Markham go to the Lindell and take separate rooms there. You go to the Lincoln."

Within forty-eight hours thereafter all the parties were on the ground and quartered according to Goldsby's directions. Ketchum and Markham drove up to the Lindell in separate hacks, one arriving several minutes after the other, and they secured rooms as far apart as possible in that hostelry. In the days that followed they were rarely seen together and none but the experienced and watchful would have suspected that they had ever

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met before or had any common interest. Starleigh went to the Lincoln, but took a room on the fifth floor.

As soon as possible after their arrival the four men held a consultation in a wine room on Sixteenth Street, a place that Goldsby hastened to secure as soon as he learned that his partners were coming. Here the newly arrived heard the details of Goldsby's last interview with Goodpasture and canvassed the situation most critically. They spent some hours in considering the form of the charter, and Goldsby submitted a new draft that he had worked out on his last trip to Omaha. Markham sat staring at the wall during this part of the proceedings, but said nothing. It was the first time he and Goldsby had met in consultation, and so far as his conduct was concerned their coming together did not seem to promise entire harmony. There was no definite thing that pointed to such a conclusion, still there was no question but that each of the quartette was conscious of it.

It was when Starleigh was trying to suggest some more diplomatic phrase for one of the paragraphs that still lacked the desired smoothness that Markham broke in:

"Don't bother about that. It's right enough, just as it is, if you get the right man to introduce

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the bill. You haven't got the right man, Goldsby."

Goldsby bit his lip but restrained the retort that he wanted to make. As soon as he could speak calmly, he said:

"Perhaps I haven't, though I'm sure of this, that I've found the man who can put our bill through if ever he will introduce it. Being certain of that, I've turned all my attention to getting a bill that he would introduce. But perhaps there's another way. Maybe you gentlemen can find better timber in the pile than I have been able to cull out," he added, throwing the charter onto the table with an air of "If you don't like what I've done, do it yourself."

"This is no time or place for showing temper," said Markham, looking squarely at Goldsby. "We're here to do just one thing, and that is to secure a charter from the state of Nebraska that will give the whole world into our hands. Such an opportunity has never come to any set of men and if we let the game get away from us it will be our own fault. But it shan't get away from us. We've got wisdom enough amongst us to win out, and we will win out if we pull together. What we've got to do is to find the best thing. I may not know it, you may not know it. What we've got to do is to hunt for it together, and

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none of us must be cut up if his pet plan gets a black eye. We don't any of us know it all."

It was a long speech and Goldsby writhed under it. At the same time he instinctively felt that every word of it was true, and he was really chagrined at his action of a moment before. He was on the point of acknowledging his fault when Markham went on:

"We're here for suggestions, and my first one is that we find a new man to do our business. That's my first impression on hearing what you have told us, Mr. Goldsby, and I've learned to rely on the way things come to me the first time."

"I'm perfectly willing to accept your suggestion, Mr. Markham," Goldsby replied, "but I swear I shall have to rely on some of you to pick the man. I've done my level best, and if I had it to do over again, I'd do just as I have done. More than that, I believe when you see Goodpasture, as I want you to, you'll agree that I've done the right thing. But yet, as you say, I'm only one of four, and I'm a long ways from knowing it all, though I've served my time at this business."

"That is perfectly satisfactory," Markham replied, as he looked at the wall again.

The result of this meeting was an agreement that the four men should go up to the capitol the

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next day and review the legislature as a whole. It was Ketchum who proposed the plan, which was unanimously adopted; whereupon the meeting adjourned, each man going to his own place by a separate route.

When the house met the next morning the four men were there to observe its make-up, each from his own separate point of view. They had gone up early, since they had learned that the day was to be an eventful one and the probabilities were that the galleries would be packed. Indeed, they found some difficulty in getting desirable seats, prompt as they were.

At this stage of the session the chief item of interest was the election of a United States senator, and over this question both branches of the legislature were badly divided. There were several candidates striving for supremacy on the majority side of the body, and the lines were sharply drawn among the friends of the rivals. The minority, composed of two factions, had stood practically as a unit, but the combined vote was not strong enough to win out. The result was that next to nothing was being done, since it was almost impossible to secure enough votes for any measure to carry it. Such was the situation on the morning in question.

The proceedings began in the humdrum way,

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but before an hour had passed an event came on which was all that Goldsby could have wished for. It so happened that on this morning a bill that had been for some weeks in the hands of a committee of which Goodpasture was a member was read a second time and put upon its passage. It was a very important measure, and had excited much comment pro and con throughout the state. The galleries were filled with men and women who were interested in it.

The question was hardly before the house before it became the basis of one of the most exciting contests that took place in that body during its entire session. And the strange feature of the performance was that Goodpasture, who was looked upon as a man without a party, was by unanimous consent of the friends of the measure made the champion of the bill. It was a many-sided fight, each senatorial faction on the alert for a chance to stab or save, as it could get the most out of it, and willing to do almost anything that would make for its man. The battle raged with varying fortunes all the morning, and more than once it looked as though the cause were hopelessly lost.

Finally Goodpasture rose to speak for the bill. Before he had finished his first sentence everybody was listening and during his entire speech not a

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sound was heard in the hall but his voice. It was no high-flown and spread-eagle oratory that he gave utterance to, but in a plain, matter-of-fact way, in a tone of voice that expressed his conviction of the truth of every word he spoke, he gave reasons why the bill should become a law. Again and again one member and another rose to ask him questions, some for actual information, others to puzzle and confuse. To each and all he gave clear, direct, and forcible answers, replies that satisfied or silenced those who interrupted him. He had an array of facts and figures to sustain his position that was absolutely convincing. These showed that he had spent days and nights in studying the problem that the measure embodied; and the fact that he was perfectly familiar with its every phase, that he actually knew all about it, begot a faith in him and what he said that was all-powerful. When at last he sat down, the vote was called for and the bill was passed by a handsome majority.

It is needless to tell here what followed. Enough to say that the representative had won his spurs honorably and that everybody was proud of him,—Goldsby in particular. He had joined in the shouts that came from the gallery when his friend came out victor, and he hastened to the floor to congratulate him as soon as the house ad-

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journed. Then he went to lunch. He was wild to meet his fellows and hear their verdict, though he was certain he knew what it would be. But he kept aloof from them all, for policy's sake, and it was not till the four met again in another wine room in the evening that he had a chance to say a word to any of them.

But now they were all together again in an upper room, and the door was shut. Goldsby's impulse was to say, "Didn't I tell you?" but he held his peace and waited. Markham had made a suggestion and he would let him make the first move. He did not have to wait long, for before they were seated Markham broke out:

"Your man is all right, Goldsby, but you've got to buy him."

"Do you think it can be done?" Goldsby asked quickly. "I confess I'm afraid of it," he added after a slight hesitation.

"Sure!" Markham replied. "The man never lived that couldn't be bought. You can't buy 'em all in the same way, but if you bring pressure enough to bear, and of the right kind, you can break any man that ever stood on two legs!"

The four sat silent for an instant, and then Markham went on:

"And the time is just ripe to get your friend to do what we want, for a consideration," he said.

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"He is drunk with applause from his victory of to-day, and when a man's head swims is the time to induce him to come your way. It don't make any difference what the liquor is. The yell of the crowd is just as effective as champagne, and it costs much less. Goodpasture's head is whirling, and while he is drunk, he'll serve us."

Even Goldsby's heart shrank just a little from the cold-bloodedness of Markham's words, but he knew they were business, and was silent. Ketchum sat with his finger pressed to his nose, and Starleigh was looking at the fire which blazed in the grate across the corner of the room.

"How much will it take to buy him?" Ketchum asked. His words indicated that he was thinking of the size of their available pile.

"Not a cent out of hand," Markham replied. "Give him a fifth interest in the business, show it all up to him, our part and all; give him to understand that he can be one of five men to own the earth and he'll come. The man don't live that wouldn't do anything for that!"

Starleigh turned to enter protest against a further division of the spoils, but Markham cut him off:

"Don't say a word, Starleigh," he said before that gentleman could utter a word of opposition. "There'll be plenty for five. Don't be a hog."

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It is that disposition in mankind that has always ruined the people who have come the nearest to being the whole thing. It was that that overthrew Napoleon, and Conkling and Cameron and Logan went down to the same tune."

It seemed as though there was a spell upon the three men as they sat there listening to Markham, while he appeared as one inspired. His eye flashed, and he turned from one to another as he spoke:

"Now here's the thing to do," he said. "Get your man into your room, Goldsby, just as you've done before. When you ask him to come, tell him that Starleigh has concluded to come west, and after he gets there, tell him that Ketchum and I are in the deal. Then go for him. We'd better all be there. We'll let Starleigh do the talking. That's natural; Goodpasture will expect it, and Starleigh has been over the story often enough so that he can tell it like an expert. When he's got it all laid out, then we'll all come in on the finish."

"But don't you think we might find some other man?" Goldsby inquired. He couldn't help this final stroke at the policy Markham had first proposed.

"We don't need to try," said Markham. "We should have had to do so if it hadn't been

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for that knock-out of Goodpasture's this morning. But that changed the whole game and made it possible for the man to come our way. What he has done once he will be wild to do again, and all we have to do is to give him a chance to get in his work. The cards have come our way, that's all."

And so it was settled that as soon as possible Goodpasture was to be invited to Goldsby's room and there be offered a fifth interest in the concern. This finally determined upon, the company broke up as before.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE next morning Goldsby met Goodpasture in the lobby of the Lincoln and invited him up to his room as usual. He there told him that Starleigh had taken his advice to come and look after the bill himself, that he was already on the ground, and had been for a couple of days.

"He tells me that by a very fortunate outcome of some of his latest experiments," Goldsby explained, "he got things into such shape that he could be away for a few days, better now than later; and because you advised it so strongly, he made up his mind to come on. He's been looking around since he arrived and making a few changes in the bill.

"He told me last night that he has got it into shape now, and that he'd like to see you for a few minutes, as soon as you've got a little time to spare. Can you come up to my room this evening, say about nine o'clock?" he asked most cordially.

"Why, yes, if you wish me to," Goodpasture replied. "Though I really doubt if it is worth

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while for me to see your friend at all," he added. "He knows his business, and when he meets some of the leaders here he'll make up his mind as to details. You know I'm not with the majority, and he'll want some one in that rank to espouse his cause."

"But my dear man," Goldsby rejoined enthusiastically, "he saw your success of yesterday, which, by the way, since we're speaking of it, was one of the most brilliant victories of the kind I ever witnessed, and he is full of admiration for you,—wouldn't talk of anything else last night. He said what you did was one of the best planned and most ably executed maneuvers he ever saw, and he's seen a good many lively skirmishes in his day. Why, do you know, his notion is that the affair will end by landing you in the United States Senate!"

Goldsby watched his man closely as he said this, and was delighted to see his eyes light up and his chest suddenly expand. "Markham is right," he said to himself. "The man don't live who can't be won, if only the prize offered be of the right kind and big enough." Then he immediately went on:

"So he's anxious to meet you, just on your own account," he said, "and I'm sure that because he knows that you know a good deal about the bill

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from what I've said to you, he'll be very glad of any suggestions you may be willing to offer."

"I'll come up," Goodpasture said laconically. "Nine o'clock, did you say?" he asked as he made ready to go.

"Yes, nine," Goldsby replied. "It's awfully good of you to come," he continued, "and Mr. Starleigh will be highly complimented and greatly obliged, I know. I'll see that he don't keep you late, for I know you're working very hard these days. You must have put in an untold amount of work on that bill you got through yesterday.—Wife and family well when you heard from them?" he asked as they neared the door.

"All well," Goodpasture answered as he went out.

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Promptly at nine o'clock that evening Goodpasture knocked at Goldsby's door. He was dressed a little more pretentiously than Goldsby had ever seen him before, and even wore a bouquet in the lapel of his evidently new coat. The decoration was a trifle large for the demands of good taste, but his host was quick to excuse this slight fault, since the demonstration plainly showed that the representative was feeling his honors and making an effort to live up to them. The game was coming their way all right. Mark-

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ham had sized up the man far better than he himself had done, and they were now on the right track.

Goldsby greeted Goodpasture warmly and introduced him to Starleigh, who was standing before the grate. He also was exceedingly cordial, and the compliments and commonplaces went round for some minutes. While they were still chatting in a general way, there was a knock at the door and Ketchum and Markham came in. Goldsby introduced them to Goodpasture as friends of Starleigh's who were in the city for a few days, and who had expressed a desire to meet the hero of the famous victory in the house the day before. They shook hands all around, after which cigars were lighted and the company sat down.

The four men had watched the representative closely to see what effect the bringing in of Ketchum and Markham would have upon him, and they were somewhat surprised that he showed no sign of being disconcerted or even astonished. They all attributed this, however, to the fact that he evidently felt it was to be expected that everybody who could get a chance to do so would seek his society, and that explained it. His head was not only beginning to swell, but had already at-

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tained considerable size. His dress and the bouquet also told the same story.

Perhaps it was these items that made Starleigh bold and anxious to get to business at once; and so, after a few more general remarks, he made the onset:

“It was very kind of you, Mr. Goodpasture, to favor us with your company this evening,” he began, “and I am especially obliged, since I know that you have come particularly on my account. I know that you are a busy man, and I mustn’t take much of your time. Besides that, we’ve all seen enough of you to know that you are a practical business man, one who comes at things direct, and so I’m sure you’ll not only excuse me but be obliged to me if I say what I have to say and make no bones about it.”

Goodpasture replied that he had always preferred to shoot right at the mark he meant to hit rather than to look one way and fire another, and that he was glad to have his friends act by the same rule. The whole company applauded this sentiment, and Starleigh proceeded:

“Of course our friend Goldsby here has made you acquainted with the general features of our enterprise. You’ve seen the bill we want to get through this legislature, and Goldsby tells me you

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approve, in general, the idea we want to carry out."

Goodpasture was going to interrupt enough to say that he thought it would be a good thing if they could wet up the entire state, especially the west end of it, but before he could utter a word Starleigh went on:

"Now, as Goldsby has showed this thing to you he has made the matter of rainfall in Nebraska the chief item in the count, but I come right down to business on the first round, and say to you frankly that while we shall do the water act all right, and just as he has represented, yet there is infinitely more in the deal than that."

Goodpasture winked his inner eye, but his face expressed only the utmost interest in what Starleigh was saying, as he continued:

"Now what I want to do to-night is to open up to you our whole scheme, to the last detail; let you see all and everything we are going to do, and then see what you think about it."

Goodpasture settled himself in his chair on this remark, as much as to say that he was ready to listen to whatever Starleigh had to say, and the speaker resumed:

"Perhaps I had better explain right here that our friends Ketchum and Markham are with us in this deal, though that fact hasn't been men-

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tioned before. In all great enterprises, the full hand isn't showed down at the first play." He laughed lightly as he said this. "But I want to assure you that they are strictly all right, and worthy of the fullest confidence. We couldn't afford to have them with us under any other circumstances. They are among the leading and most influential brokers in the eastern market, or in this country, for that matter, and they will have charge of the financial part of our enterprise. That's why we wanted them present to-night."

Ketchum nodded, and Markham took his eye off the wall for an instant.

"As I have said," Starleigh continued, "while water for Nebraska is a leading and valuable asset in our concern, what we are really going to do is to overturn the world, so to speak, to readjust it on new lines, and make it as much superior to what it is now as its present condition surpasses what it was when the saurians dragged themselves through pre-historic slime!"

He had meant to startle Goodpasture, and he did so. The representative sat bolt upright in his chair at the conclusion of this remarkable sentence, and his look and his pose clearly expressed his conviction that he had fallen into the hands of a company of lunatics. It was Markham who came to his rescue with the words:

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"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Goodpasture," he said. "We aren't crazy, any of us, but we've got the biggest thing that mortal man ever went up against, and if you will sit still there in your chair, Starleigh will tell you all about it."

Goodpasture settled back.

And then it was that Starleigh began once more at the beginning and went through the whole story as he had done before. He left nothing out (Markham had advised to that effect) and the narration, as it was told with the most recent addition of plan and purpose, was more wonderful than ever. For more than two hours Starleigh enlarged upon the theme before he came to a stand.

Goodpasture sat there wondering. He pinched himself more than once to make sure that it was not all a dream, and when the thing was finally ended he got up and drank a full glass of wine greedily. His throat was dry and his pulse was fast. As he sat down again, Starleigh proceeded:

"Now!" he said, "Now you see what there is in it. What we've got is the whole earth, body, boots, and breeches. When our plans are fully carried out, we shall be the whole thing, and everybody in all the world will do our bidding and

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pay us tribute. Kings will do as we say, and presidents will come to us for everything."

He glowed from head to foot with enthusiasm, and his blood boiled from the heat of the fever of ambition that consumed him.

It was at this point that Markham came to Starleigh's relief, as there was full need of his doing.

"Now, Mr. Goodpasture," he began, "you comprehend the situation, and I am sure you will acknowledge that it is the most momentous that any man or set of men ever confronted. I am free to say that it almost paralyzed me when I first got knowledge of it through Mr. Starleigh's asking us to manage the financial side of the undertaking, and I do not wonder that it overwhelms you as it is brought to your knowledge for the first time. But that will wear away as you become familiar with its details, and you will soon come to see that it is the greatest scheme for promoting the ultimate good of the human race that the mind of man ever conceived!"

As Markham proceeded, Goodpasture began to pull himself together and get himself into a state of mind to fully comprehend all that was taking place. He told Markham that it was the greatest enterprise he had ever had any knowledge of,

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and that he marveled at it beyond all telling. At length Markham said:

"Now, to attain the great results that our plan will ultimate in, it is necessary for us to get a charter that will permit us to set up our plant in this or some other state. My partner assures me that Cherry County is the ideal spot for what we want, and what we must have. And that brings us face to face with our business here to-night."

He drew himself up and turned full upon Goodpasture as he said this, a position that he retained during the entire speech that followed.

"Mr. Goodpasture," he said, "when we came to Lincoln, two days ago, we none of us had any idea that we should do what we are now doing, or that any of us would say what I am about to say. Our plan then was to get some member of the legislature to introduce our bill and to work it through in the regular way. But we were all up at the house yesterday, and we saw your unprecedented victory in that body. Then we realized what a wonderful man you are—"

"Sit still!" he commanded as Goodpasture raised his hands in protest. "I know that it's all a surprise to you. Real greatness is always more of a surprise to its possessor than to any one else! Wellington never fully comprehended his abilities, and Lincoln had no idea of how great

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a man he really was. And it's the same way with you. I never dreamed that the West held such stuff, for I've never been much away from the East. But it's all here, and it's all in you! You'll go to the Senate, of course you will, and you'll be an honor to the nation, second to none in that great body! And may we all be there to see!"

He stopped as if to get his breath, and Goldsby took advantage of the halt to fill the glasses and propose a toast to the next senator from Nebraska. Goodpasture accepted the compliment with the best grace he was possessed of at the moment, and Markham proceeded:

"And now, since we have discovered your limitless resources, we have unanimously agreed that it is our bounden duty to put you in a position where you can use the gifts that a prodigal Creator has bestowed upon you. You can do something with them in the Senate of the United States, but even that body will not offer you an opportunity commensurate with your powers. What we want you to do is to come with us and to be one of five men to own and manage the affairs of the whole world!"

He had risen to his feet now, had Markham, and towered above them all as he spoke.

"Say the word!" he declared. "Say that you

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will share this great trust with us, and make us all happy. We need you. The commission is so great that we absolutely require the ablest mental endowments in all the world, and you are the possessor of what we must have. Merely in consideration of your colossal talents we offer you a one-fifth interest in the whole world. You'll take it," he asserted. "Of course you will! Give me your hand on it, and the thing's done!"

He reached out his hand to grasp Goodpasture's, almost making a grab for it, to take it perforce; but the representative never moved a muscle. The four were now standing in a circle about him, and their eyes were fixed upon him as he sat there. It was a supreme moment to him and his head swam under the strain. He lifted his hand an inch or two from his knee as if to yield, but before Markham could secure it he dropped it again and fell back in his chair.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE scene that followed no tongue or pen can ever describe. It was one of those terrific hours of trial that come to men in this strenuous age. One after another, the four men addressed themselves to Goodpasture, who was the target for their common assault.

Goldsby adjured him by the love he bore his family, whom this achievement would place high above the station of princes and kings, not to let the occasion pass unaccepted. It was a duty he owed to those he loved most, he urged. Ketchum insisted it was an obligation due to humanity, that a man possessed of such consummate abilities to benefit mankind had no right to withdraw into himself and hide his talent in a napkin.

Starleigh declared that it was beyond belief that a general should refuse to command when victory was just in sight, and Markham insisted that nothing but insanity could account for a refusal to accept what was here offered.

Thus the conflict waged, till at length Goodpasture got enough command of himself to say:

“This is all exceedingly kind of you, gentle-

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men, but what do I give in return for this great favor that you are bestowing upon me?"

"Just your own services," Markham leaped to reply. "And that is enough! When the world or any set of men in the world discovers supreme ability they are willing to pay any price to avail themselves of it. And whatever price they pay is none too high. Merit towers above everything else, and whatever it demands it gets!"

"But you gentlemen know very little of my real abilities," Goodpasture protested. "You have seen very little of me. To be sure, I won out in the house the other day, but it was really an easy thing to do. The facts were all on my side; the opposition was divided, and so it was easily overcome. I honestly feel that you are counting too much on this single event."

He was getting control of himself as he talked, and he multiplied his words to give time for further recuperation.

"And, after all," he went on, "if I do say yes, won't it really be selling what is not mine for that which I alone shall get the benefit of?"

It was a deadly thrust, and the chief gladiator of them all undertook to parry the blow.

"Mr. Goodpasture," Markham asserted, "there is a view of morality that is current among men that is wholly unjustifiable. And you will

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excuse me if I say that you are evidently a victim of that form of ethics. But will you let me show you where you are entirely wrong; and if I fail to establish the point beyond further controversy we'll say no more about this business, one way or the other."

"Go on," said Goodpasture, and Markham proceeded:

"Now it is surely a fundamental truth that every man is entitled to the product of his own labor. Deny that and you cut the foundation from under all civilization, and we might as well revert to barbarism at once."

"You certainly have the precedents of all history behind you in that proposition," Goodpasture replied.

"I certainly have," Markham returned, well satisfied that he had his first logical stake so firmly driven in that it wouldn't pull up when the strain of conclusion came. "Now, will you stop and calmly consider what it is that you are the possessor of, and how it came to be yours?" he continued. "In the first place, you have consummate natural ability to manage men. Say that you inherited it? I know nothing of your ancestry, but if it came to you in that way, surely no one else can have any claim on it whatever, for it is another fundamental law of civilized life that

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inherited possessions belong solely to those in the line of succession. No one can deny that.

"Or, suppose that this power is something that you have acquired by your own personal effort. In that case, perhaps more than in the other, if such a thing were possible, the possession is yours, for you have earned it. On either count or both of them, what you have is yours, and no living soul can of right lay claim to any interest in it whatever.

"Now go on," he said, "and see what the exercise of this power has brought you,—what you have acquired by the use of your talent. And even the Bible condemns a man who does not use his talent to the utmost."

He was making an argument now, and would let nothing escape him, for on its result the success or failure of their plans might hinge.

"In the first place you secured the unanimous nomination and election to the legislature, every man in your district that voted at all voting for you."

Goodpasture turned his eye towards Goldsby for an instant, but that gentleman was looking into the fire. Markham went on:

"I wonder if you realize how rare an achievement that is," he said. "I never knew a like case in my life, but you have accomplished it.

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"Then, when you get here, a man without a party, and so, in the natural order of things, as politicians ordinarily count them, with all the odds against you, this wonderful power which you possess (and which, don't forget, is yours, and for that same reason what it produces is yours),—this power enables you to defeat the combined organizations of your entire state and win a victory that no other man or body of men in the legislature could secure."

Goodpasture was going to speak, but Markham held him off:

"No," he said, "hear me through. Now all this means that you have made yourself the leader of this legislature. You are the man of the hour in that body. Anything you ask for you can have. You have proved your superiority to the entire membership of both houses. You have won all this by your own unaided effort, and are not indebted to a living soul for the smallest fraction of any part of it. It is yours, absolutely; and hence, you have a right to use your own as you will. There is no escaping that conclusion, and any alleged ethical principle that would assume to disprove it is mere nonsense."

He drew nearer to Goodpasture again as he once more approached a climax.

"Now," he said, "it so happens that we have



"Look at that telephone!" Page 343.

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an enterprise which, when worked out, will be of untold benefit to millions of mankind. Granted that it will also be of benefit to us. We have a right to be benefited by it. We have created it, just as you have created what you have. It is ours, just as any invention is the property of the man who discovers it, and we shall use it for our own good, just as other inventors use their inventions for their own good. There can be nothing wrong in that.

“These are the facts in the case so far. But to get our invention on its feet we need just one thing more. Without it we are helpless, and our discovery is of no value. Just as gunpowder is useless without a spark to fire it, so our enterprise must remain inert without the lacking factor to give it energy. This factor you have. It is yours, and you have the right to do with it what you will. And because we can make it valuable to us, and also indirectly more valuable to you, we put the whole affair on a square business basis, and offer to merge our interests with yours for the mutual benefit of all concerned. We are not giving you something for nothing. We are not bribing you nor attempting to bribe you. We are simply asking you to become a partner in an enterprise that can only be established by mutual effort and investment. We are willing to put in our share, and

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we hold ourselves ready to have you make your contribution. This you have in your own hand and you can legally and rightfully use it for our mutual undertaking. Will you do it? Of course you will! Only an insane man could do otherwise. It is not folly, it is positive insanity to refuse."

Again he came forward and extended his hand, but again Goodpasture kept his hand on his knee. The men were circled about as before.

When Markham had finished his argument, and had turned away after failing to secure Goodpasture's assent, the representative drew a long breath and sat up straight in his chair. He looked at the group curiously for an instant, and then he said:

"You have made a powerful and most convincing argument, Mr. Markham; and now, before I finally make up my mind, permit me to ask a few questions."

"Say yes or no, and then ask what you please; we'll answer," Markham retorted. He was seated and looking at the wall now.

"No, that wouldn't be fair, on your own basis," Goodpasture replied. "You say that you ask me to make an investment of property that is my own because I have earned it. Grant that you are correct, and that it would be perfectly right

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for me to use my prestige in the legislature to secure your charter, and to take a fifth interest in your concern as my just due for services rendered; still, you can't blame me for wanting to know just what I am putting my property into, and all the details of the enterprise before I invest."

Markham was silent, but Starleigh replied:

"Why, I've told you all about it, my dear sir," he said. "We've showed you absolutely everything there is in it, and you can't think it isn't enough."

"He's showed you just twice as much as he showed us before we decided to come in," Ketchum urged, with finger on nose.

"It is not the sum total that I want to know more about," Goodpasture replied, "but one or two items a good deal this side of there. I want to know where we (All four men were glad he said *we*. It was a good sign, at a time when such signals were most welcome) are going to get the money to establish our plant. I think I ought to know that before I come in. Mr. Goldsby knows very well that I have very little in the way of tangible property, and that I can contribute absolutely nothing to the financial side of the business. Of course I don't know how you gentlemen are fixed," and he turned to Ketchum and Markham, "but I

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feel that as a business man I ought to post myself on this particular before I add my contribution to the common stock."

There was a sound like the grinding of teeth from where Markham sat, but his face was a blank. It seemed to be the unanimous opinion of the four that here was Goldsby's opportunity and that it was fitting he should make reply. The plan for raising first money was his and it was natural that he should unfold it. Nor was he at all averse to doing so, now that Goodpasture had said "we."

So Goldsby went through his device for issuing stock based on a share in the increased crop in Nebraska, etc., etc. When he had finished, Goodpasture said:

"How big an issue will we make?"

"We can't say exactly," Goldsby responded, "but Ketchum and Markham will underwrite \$500,000,000 for the consolidated concern. They are perfectly familiar with such transactions (that's why we had them come with us), and their opinion is that they can float stock to that amount on the basis of the average crop products of Nebraska for the last ten years."

"Do I understand then that Ketchum and Markham will put up five hundred million dollars to start the business?" Goodpasture asked.

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Markham choked.

Goldsby explained the nature of underwriting in detail, and told what it was that the brokers would really do, whereupon Goodpasture said:

"Then the people who buy stock in the general market are the ones who will actually furnish the money to purchase our guns with."

"In a way, yes," Goldsby replied. "But they will get the worth of their money in the stock they buy. It's value received, and that's always square."

"But suppose the bombarding doesn't bring the rain. And, besides, you are going to make Nebraska a tropical state. What about the security of the stock then?"

It was here that Markham came to the rescue.

"My dear sir," he said, "no man can rightfully be held responsible for the outcome of a speculative investment. If those who negotiate such paper had to do that, few men could afford to be brokers. And it is as it ought to be that things are as they are. We put paper on the market and state what security there is behind it. The whole thing is submitted for public inspection. And if they are sure enough of the security to risk their money on it, that's their affair, and nobody else's. Why, it would never do to hold a broker responsi-

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ble for the stock he sells. The success or failure of the securities is not in his hands at all, and there is no law that can hold a man responsible for the doings of outside parties. We take this stock, and tell the public what there is behind it,—show the crop reports of Nebraska for ten years, and that this stock calls for one-half the increase forever, and we state what that increase will *probably* be as the result of the bombarding we propose to do. The people see it, and take their chances, and that's enough. Of course, it isn't a dead sure game. A sure thing, these days, means less than three per cent, net, and the average investor can never afford to put in his money on anything as slow as that. The people won't have that sort of paper. What they want is stuff that has the possibility of immense returns, and they are willing to take almost any number of chances of loss if they can get even a hope of winning, somehow. I've been in the business a good while, and I know what I'm talking about."

"I haven't a doubt but that you are right," Goodpasture replied. "I get circulars from brokers all over the country, every day, offering all sorts of chances on all sorts of things. I've often wondered about the inside of it."

"They don't any of them promise a dead sure

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thing, do they?" Ketchum said. "They all say that it's a speculation, don't they?"

"I guess they do," Goodpasture replied. "But most of 'em that I've seen somehow make it seem like a sure thing. Maybe it's the way their circulars are made up to read," he added.

Markham was getting restless, but Goodpasture went on with his questions.

"Well then, if we fail to get water from our shooting, the people lose five hundred millions," he said.

"That's their lookout and not ours!" Ketchum insisted.

"If the water don't come, and you want to make 'em square," Markham put in, "you can let 'em exchange their stock for stock in the consolidated concern, dollar for dollar. We'll have the move made by that time. We can take care of the original investors, though there's no reason why we should. Nobody ever does. They are the ones that are always left to hold the sack. It's the regular thing, and everybody expects it. But if you are particular about it, we'll save some cotton to do our sheared lambs up in this time, and on this deal only."

"It may be foolish," Goodpasture remarked,

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“but I think I should prefer to have it that way,—to have at least cotton left for the lambs!”

The company all laughed. It seemed to be taken for granted that Goodpasture was fairly in now, and that what was going on was practically a board meeting.

After the laugh had subsided, Goodpasture proceeded:

“Well, how about the people who are going to be washed out by our equatorial water-rise?” he asked. “Will there be any cotton for them?”

Markham was on his feet in an instant, and with the utmost fervor he replied to this last question.

“Mr. Goodpasture,” he said, “you totally misconceive the basis of business. Business is not kind. It never was and it never will be,—that is, business on a large scale, business that moves on a plane with nature. There may be a sort of petty trading that can afford to have regard to the other fellow, but nothing big can stoop to such effeminacy. A great business is like the elements of the earth. They grant no favors and ask none. The volcano shoots up, and it buries everything and everybody that is within range, and makes no apologies. The testimony of the rocks is that earth-convulsions have destroyed millions of lives, in past ages, the lives of men and women, as well

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as countless animals of all sorts and descriptions. Yet out of it all has come this grand world of to-day, with the finest civilization conceivable, nothing of which would have been possible but for the terrible revolutions that have incidentally wrought so much ruin and death. We may not like it. We may think that we could have made a better way. But that is neither here nor there. The great law of evolution has revealed the one everlasting and eternal law of the survival of the fittest, and that law knows no mercy, and still less does it care for the maudlin squeamishness of sentimental ethics. Nature is nature, and business is business! The power that made one made the other, and it is idiocy to quarrel with or criticise either. It is enough if we take the world as we find it and look out for ourselves. That's nature's way, and it's the way of all great business enterprises, and it's right. It's taken a good while to find it out,—took me a good while to discover the law of the right of the strongest to all they could get. But it is only through that law that the human race has advanced, and by the same principle that business has come to its own. Quarrel with what some folks call God, if you want to, but be man enough to acknowledge the facts, that the record He has made foots up against Him. We shan't

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do any worse than He has done, ten thousand times. He exercises His laws and rights, and we'll do the same by ours! "

It was a long speech, and its maker emphasized it with every fiber of his body. When it was ended, he emptied a glass and sat down, while for a moment silence filled the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

MARKHAM'S speech seemed to close the argument for that side. It swept everything before it, and was like the elements of nature which had inspired it. The company sat without a word for some minutes, but finally Goodpasture made answer, as follows:

"I think there is nothing more to be said," he began, "so far as revealing the whole nature and scope of your plan is concerned. And now that we've got to solid rock-bottom, I'm ready to say what I must say from my standpoint."

"Say it in one word," Markham retorted savagely. "Say yes or no, and let that settle it! We've talked too much as it is, and we've got no time to fool away."

"Well then, *no!*" Goodpasture replied. He spoke in a quiet tone, but every one in the room felt that he meant what he said.

"Fool!" Markham roared, as he rose quickly and started towards the door.

Goodpasture leaped from his chair and placed himself directly in front of the great broker to intercept him.

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"Stand aside!" Markham shouted, as he confronted the representative. "Step out of my way or I'll kill you as I would a fly!" And he raised his heavy cane threateningly.

But Goodpasture stood his ground and never flinched a hair's breadth. He drew himself up to his full height, and in a strong and steady voice said:

"Oh, no. You'll not kill me. You'll not even strike me. Look at that telephone." And he pointed to the instrument,—the room 'phone, which was fastened to the wall within a few feet of where they were standing.

Instinctively Markham glanced at the instrument, and almost before he was aware he had said:

"Well, what about it?"

"This!" Goodpasture made haste to reply. "That telephone is 'cut in,' and I have a number of friends in a room down the hall who are listening through it to every word we say. If I shout, I can give the alarm and they will be at the door before you can get out of this room. Over that 'phone they have heard you offer to bribe me, and in this state it is a penitentiary offense to offer a legislator a bribe. So if you choose to take the chances of being run in, every one of you, just

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make one move of violence, and the work is done!"

Markham lowered his cane, but the next instant he turned again upon Goodpasture.

"You lie!" he roared. "The receiver is on the hook, and the instrument can't be cut in when it is that way." And he made as if to pass again.

"Stop, or I shout for help!" Goodpasture exclaimed.

Markham obeyed the command, and Goodpasture went on to explain:

"It is true," he said, "that the receiver is on the hook, but the instrument is working all the same. When I found that I had to come here alone to-night, I arranged with the hotel electrician to have that 'phone fixed so that it would work with the receiver on the hook. I had to have it fixed that way or you would have discovered the ruse. The man attended to the business this afternoon while you were out of the room, Mr. Goldsby, and I had it fully tested before this session began."

"You are a sneaking scoundrel!" Markham exclaimed.

"Oh, no, I am not," Goodpasture replied. "I'm only an imitator. That's the worst thing you can truthfully charge me with, and I'll plead guilty on that count without a murmur. For, let

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me tell you, right here, that I learned the trick from you, Mr. Markham! You may be a little surprised at that statement," he went on to say, as he saw the quick exchange of questioning glances that shot from man to man among the four who stood before him, as if each were searching for the traitor in their ranks, "but I'll make it all clear to you after awhile. The fact is, I have been well aware of the existence of all of you gentlemen for some weeks, though this is the first time I have ever met you face to face. And when I got on track of you, and found out I should probably come in contact with you some day, I felt it my duty to look up your records,—to find out what you were like. And in looking up your work in New York, which I did through a friend of mine, I found, among other clever things, that it was a custom of yours to have a full report of what took place in your office preserved on a phonograph! I haven't stolen your patent exactly, but I have modified your plan. Instead of a phonograph, I have substituted four friends of mine who are sitting in a room down the hall with receivers to their ears all connected with this 'phone, and they have heard every word we have said in this room this evening."

If the quartette, any or all of them, could have called down fire from heaven, Goodpasture would

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have been a cinder in a second; but lacking that power, which is not so common a commodity as it used to be in story books of old, they stood stolidly in their places, while the now master of ceremonies continued:

"Two of these four men," he explained, "are members of the house, one is a shorthand reporter, and the fourth is a detective. So you see I've got all the essentials necessary for a full report of the proceedings of this meeting, even if I haven't it recorded on a phonographic plate."

Markham glared like a demon, but the other men were pale and silent. And yet, out of the stress and trial of the moment there came a sound from Starleigh's throat that was suspiciously like a chuckle, that, being interpreted, would say to Markham, "You are caught in your own trap, and it serves you right!" But the pause was for an instant only, and Goodpasture went on:

"Now you know all about that part of the story and if you'll all sit down I'll tell you what little else I have to say and then wish you good night. If you behave yourselves, it will be all right. If you are foolish and offer me personal violence, I have only to shout for help, as I have already told you, and there'll be a posse at the door inside of thirty seconds. Sit down, gentlemen!" he added;

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and no one could blame him if there was triumph in his voice.

So they sat down. Markham's face was purple with rage, Ketchum held his nose hard, Starleigh was pale as a ghost, and Goldsby gazed into the fire. Then Goodpasture said his say.

"Gentlemen," he began, "the two principal ingredients in my make-up are curiosity and caution. The first is the most pronounced, and has had more to do with bringing me to where I am now, so far as you are concerned, than any other one thing. The trouble began some months ago, when Mr. Goldsby came to my house with that cough of his."

Starleigh gasped as he shot an I-told-you-so-all-the-time look at his first partner, but Goldsby only stared at the fire.

"When you came up that evening and began to cough as you did," Goodpasture continued, addressing Goldsby direct, "you sprouted a germ of curiosity in me that has continued to grow till to-night. The plant it produced came to maturity a few minutes ago, when Mr. Markham finished his speech, and it will probably dry up and die in due time. But I simply couldn't help its growing and staying with me, for you gave it such an awful big start that it flourished in spite of me and I couldn't root it out.

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"The question that I never could settle, and that never lost interest for me a single instant from start to finish, was why in the world a stout healthy man, that was good for two hundred pounds any day on any scales, should cough like a consumptive that was so far gone that you could read a newspaper through his palms,—that was what puzzled me. It was a curiosity that hit me so hard that before I knew it I coughed back sympathetically,—and once started in on that tack, we have both been obliged to keep up the ruse whenever we have met. It has been a severe strain on us both, and I am sure we are both glad that we shan't have to keep it up any longer."

Goldsby ground his teeth and swore a vitriolic oath under his breath as Goodpasture proceeded:

"Honestly, gentlemen," he said, "I tried to live down my curiosity, for I liked Goldsby immensely, and we have had ever so many pleasant hours and good times together; but just as I was getting the better of it, though we both continued to cough, he set me off again by giving me an elegant dictionary!"

Goldsby swore again, louder and bitterer than before, but he sat still in his place. The telephone was on the wall, and they all had due regard for it.

"Make a short story of it," Markham growled. "It's late, and we're all tired."

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"I'll do it," Goodpasture replied; "I won't keep you long. And yet there are some things that I must say to make the record straight and put you onto my point of view,—to make you understand why I have done just as I have.

"After the dictionary episode, I was left in the dark till I got up here to Lincoln, and then I got another start. Before I had been here twenty-four hours I saw Goldsby on the street, and the first time I went into the Lincoln Hotel I found he had this suite of rooms at the head of a row of lobbies. Afterwards I found out that he had a detective on my track, and that he was keeping an eye upon me continually. After awhile he met me and claimed to be the most surprised man in the world,—pretended that he had no idea how I happened to be in the town, and wanted to know what I was doing. Do you think I could help being curious under such circumstances?" he asked.

No one said a word.

"Then he began to ride with me and to make me his confidant," Goodpasture continued, "and then I confess I began to be alarmed. That was when my bump of caution began to get in its work, and because I didn't know what else to do I took an old friend of mine into my confidence, a man who happens to be chief of detectives here. We had been boys together, and I knew I could

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trust him, and that he would keep me out of trouble. And he has!" he added. "He's down the hall now, with his ear to the 'phone, and faithfully hearing every word I say. It was through the investigation that his associates in New York made for me that I found out about how you worked your phonograph business in your Wall Street office, and he set up the scheme of doctoring that telephone for me, for he said I ought not to be alone in the presence of four men who were trying to work me,—that I ought to have witnesses. And I have!" he added, while the four men before him writhed.

"There are four witnesses and a written record of all the proceedings, if we ever have occasion to refer to them.

"But I needn't go into all the details," he remarked, as his audience seemed restless. "I simply wanted to let you know that your work has been so supremely clever all along the line that you have made it impossible for me to get the better of my curiosity regarding it. You held me off and held me off, and the more you did so, the more curious I was to see the bottom of it all. I've seen it, and I'm satisfied."

"Well then let us go to bed," Markham protested, rising again.

"Just a minute more and I'm done," Good-

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pasture replied. "I don't want to close the proceedings till I say just a word about what you have proposed to me. I don't know whether you could do what you have planned to do with the earth or not, but I'll suppose that you could. But if you could do it, it is something that you never ought to be permitted to do on the basis that you propose. I won't argue the case with you, though I surely have a right to reply to what you have said to me. But the fact is, you are all wrong in your idea of what can rightfully be done in the name of business in this day and age."

"But you know—" Markham began.

"You will excuse me, sir," Goodpasture interrupted, "but I have the floor. You will all bear witness that I heard each one of you through without a word, and now you must hear me through, or I'll call for help."

The four subsided, and Goodpasture went on:

"Now I'm no saint—"

"Tell us something that isn't self-evident," Markham interlarded.

Goodpasture paid no heed to the interruption, but continued:

"But I know this, that the great bulk of the business of the world, as it is done to-day, is done on the basis of the golden rule. You gentlemen don't believe that, as was shown in a masterly

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manner by Mr. Markham's speech; but it is none the less true. You are not representative business men of this or any other age. You belong to a small class of unfortunate people who see the business world through twisted eyes that fail to report the world to you as it really is. It seems to me you are insane. Or if that is too strong, it is certainly true that you are abnormal."

"Good many others afflicted with the same disease!" Markham retorted. "You've got to measure all great financiers with the same yardstick, to put 'em all into the same pile. We shan't be lonesome!"

"That's very true," Goodpasture replied. "You will find a good deal of company. I grant that there are a good many like you to-day, for the wonderfully rapid developments of the last fifty years have tended to greatly increase your kind. The temptation to acquire great fortunes quickly, and the unguarded opportunities for doing so by the use of methods which were right under the old order of things, but which are altogether wrong as things are now, have put too severe a strain on the moral fiber of a good many people."

"What's right once is always right!" Markham insisted.

"Oh, no, my dear sir," Goodpasture replied. "There is where you are entirely wrong; and it

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is by espousing just that principle that the great bulk of business wrongdoing is effected to-day. It is by insisting on the infallibility and the never-changing persistence of precedent that men who work as you propose to work, now virtually *rob* their fellow-men. That is a rough word," he added; "but it is the only one in the dictionary that will adequately describe what you do.

"And yet you do all that you do under the cover of existing laws, and backed up, beyond question, by the example of men in former generations whose deeds were never counted as anything but the very best. But what was once right, or at least well enough, under an old order of civilization, is very far from being right as things are now.

"For instance," he continued, "it was once right for a man to take a herd of cattle and pasture them anywhere he chose, on the unoccupied plains that used to be in this state. His act did not conflict, in any way, with the rights of any other of his fellow-men. But as other men came into the same territory, and brought their right to make a living with them, the unlimited herder had to take them into account, and it was no longer right for him to continue to do what he was once perfectly justified in doing. The formulated laws that regulate civilized society are never stable. The prin-

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ciples that underlie them are unvarying, but the working basis of such laws is a constantly changing quantity. The wiping out of such laws and precedents as have served their time, and which have come to be used to bring about the very reverse of what they once accomplished, that is a slow and tedious process, but it is something that has to be done. And the enactment of a new law in the place of the old,—one that shall work justice under the new order,—this always lags behind the necessity for its enactment; and between the time that the old order has outlived its usefulness and become a plague instead of a blessing, and the enactment of a new order that shall work justice,—right there men of your stamp get in their work, and rob, and defraud, and steal, in the name of the law and under cover of what was once right. There are not a great many of you who do this, but there are too many, and the number is going to grow smaller in the not distant future. The time of the making of some very necessary laws regarding the unlimited herder in human society as it exists to-day is not far distant.

“And so, I say, you are wrong when you insinuate that the great bulk of business men are hard dealers who don’t care a rap for what happens, so long as they can get a dollar out of it. You take the great bulk of the bankers and mon-

eyed men of this nation to-day, and they are noble, square-dealing and generous men."

"Easy to see you live in the country," Markham sneered.

"I haven't a doubt of it," Goodpasture returned. "But even country people can see some things, and they know some things pretty well. I do live in the country, and as a farmer I've had a good chance to observe how certain kinds of city people try to take advantage of us and virtually rob us of our money. I've had hundreds of circulars from curbstone brokers and promoters of all sorts of things, all showing me how I could get rich in a few days. I know all about that. But if you should take all the business that is done in that way in a year, for the whole country, you'd find it a very small per cent of all the business done by all the people in this nation in the same time. There are rogues, I know; but, none the less, the great bulk of the people are honest, most of the time, and it's the majority that counts. We're none of us spotless."

"Unless we are country people," said Markham. He couldn't let Goodpasture alone, and it was perhaps as well so.

"No, country people are just as good and just as bad as city people; no better, no worse," the representative replied. "For instance, the farm-

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ers of this state robbed the bankers of the East of millions of dollars a few years ago by giving them mortgages on land that wasn't worth a tenth part of the money they borrowed on it."

"And yet you say the bulk of the people are honest!" Markham retorted. "Damned crooked logic."

"I grant it," Goodpasture returned. "But the logic is the worst part of it, as is often the case. That's how it was when you proved to me, beyond question, that I had a right to use my prestige in the legislature for my own private gain. The logic was all right. But a good deal of the logic in this world is at its best when it won't hang together. Or at least a good deal of it that does hang together is the most damnable stuff that I know of outside the bottomless pit! You men are all the victims of a merciless logic that has led you astray. That's always what's wrong with any great evil. Slavery was established and continued on a logical basis that was absolutely impregnable. A system of theology that consigned the bulk of humanity to eternal torment was founded on the same wretched underpinning. But slavery has gone, the idea that there's hope for all men is coming to the fore, and one of these days we'll get far enough along to see that the golden rule is the

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true foundation of business, logic to the contrary notwithstanding.

"Why, it's only the other day that a railroad president said that it was to his interest, and to the interest of all the stockholders, that they take the best possible care of all the people that lived along their line. And he was right about it. He said that the road is wholly dependent on the people for what it gets, and the more they have, the more the road will get. And that's good sense, and it's the golden rule. A robber is always a shortsighted man."

He paused just an instant; then he said:

"A word or two more, and I'm done."

"Thank God!" Markham ejaculated.

"I only want to say that the day is not far distant when it will no longer be possible for men to do what you men have been trying to do by coming out here. The work of promoting, on the basis you men are practicing it, is robbing the people of millions on millions every year. The ways of accomplishing the theft are so new and so ingenious that society hasn't yet learned to protect itself against them. But it will learn how as the years go on. We have wiped lotteries out of existence in this country, and one of these days we'll do the same thing with fraudulent stockjobbing. It won't be to-morrow, but it will be some day.

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"It is the business of civilized society to protect its citizens, and it will do it just as fast as it learns how.

"In the meantime, it will have to rely on curiosity and caution, detectives, doctored telephones, and a few like things to head off, at least now and then, a few of the men who persuade themselves that they have the right to bribe, rob, and murder, so long as they do it logically and inside existing laws."

He stopped and they thought he was going to leave the room. But he turned to Goldsby before he went, and said:

"Mr. Goldsby, a good many years ago I read in a history of the life of Madam Paalzow, a German woman, that she used to say: 'The lies with which we deceive ourselves are far more numerous than those with which we impose upon other people.' And she told the truth! Good night, gentlemen!"

And he passed out.

Markham was in the hall an instant later. He left the company without a word, and Ketchum followed him without once looking behind. Starleigh and Goldsby stood before the slowly dying fire for a minute. Starleigh was pale, and Goldsby's eyes were staring. Suddenly Starleigh said:

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"See you in the morning, old man. Good night!"

As he went down the hall, he heard his partner lock the door.

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Starleigh rose late the next morning. He had slept little, but he lay in bed because it seemed to him there was nothing to get up for.

The dining room was closed as he came down, and he went to the café for a cup of coffee. As he passed the office the clerk handed him his mail. He did not look at it when he took it, but as he was drinking his coffee he ran over the superscriptions. He stopped suddenly as his eye fell upon an envelope addressed with a typewriter and which bore the imprint of The Lincoln. He knew it was from Goldsby. He tore it open hastily, and read as follows:

MY DEAR OLD MAN:

The game is up, and I alone am to blame for its failure. I'll not ask you to excuse me, or even to think that I did my best. Such things have no place in business, as Markham truly says. I've proved that I have no business ability worthy the name. In that line, I am not one of the fittest, but the weakest of the weak, and such have no place in the procession. So I drop out. I write

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this merely to say that I have left the transom unlatched so they won't have to break in.

GOLDSBY.

P. S.—I sign this with a pen to establish the identity of the writer. There are times when a machine signature don't go! Bah!

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Three men were lunching at a fashionable restaurant. Their talk was of a characteristic sort.

"I went out to see Starleigh one day last week," Parsons said.

"How is the old man, anyhow?" Briggs asked.

"Hard lines!" Parsons replied. "Though it would be funny if it wasn't so damned tragical," he went on.

"He's really off then, is he?" said Briggs.

"Crazy as a loon," Parsons answered. "He knew me all right, and seemed awfully glad to see me, but before I'd been with him two minutes he began on me:

" 'You won't go back on me, will you, Parsons?' he said.

" 'Why should I go back on you?' says I.

"And then he came close up to me and spoke low:

" 'Jealousy,' says he. 'They're all so jealous of me that they go back on me. They don't know

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how great a man I am. Why, Parsons, old man, I own every foot of the United States, and I've got an appointment with King Edward for Monday morning, and before Saturday night I'll own all of England and India! What do you think of that?' he said, and slapped me on the leg.

" 'Where'd you get your money?' says I. For I thought I'd better humor him a little.

" 'Money?' says he. 'No trouble for me to get money. Why, on the last trip home from Europe I took my toothbrush out of my vest pocket and figured out a profit of ten millions on the back of an old envelope! Did that right in the middle of the Atlantic, and had the paper cashed up within an hour after I got to New York! ' "

"Got it bad, hasn't he?" said Briggs.

"I should say," Parsons returned. "But what little I've told you isn't a marker to other things he said during the half hour I was with him. He's got a scheme for mental telegraphy that is as far ahead of Marconi as Marconi is ahead of Morse. Then he's building a telescope that he told me would enable him to see a chicken feather on the planet Saturn. Oh, it's a pity," he added. "But he won't last long. They say such cases usually knock a man out inside of two years."

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“ Good thing it’s that way,” Briggs commented, as he lit a cigar.

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The firm of Ketchum and Markham is still doing business at the old stand.

